

STATE OF ALASKA

SARAH PALIN, Governor

ANILCA IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM Office of Project Management and Permitting

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June 15, 2009

Jason Anderson, Thorne Bay District Ranger
Tongass National Forest
P.O. Box 19001
Thorne Bay, AK 99919-0001

Greg Killinger, Craig District Ranger
Tongass National Forest
P.O. Box 705
Craig, AK 99921-9998

Dear Mr. Anderson and Mr. Killinger:

The State of Alaska reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Access and Travel Management Plan (ATM) for the Prince of Wales Island and surrounding islands, which includes both the Thorne Bay and Craig Ranger Districts of the Tongass National Forest. The following consolidated state agency comments were compiled by the State's Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Implementation Program and cover issues relative to ANILCA and other state interests. Any correspondence or response pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act and the Alaska Coastal Management Program will be provided separately by the Division of Coastal and Ocean Management.

We recognize the considerable effort put forth by the Districts to inventory and analyze access and use on the extensive road system on Prince of Wales Island. We especially appreciate the *Note from the Rangers*, which provides the public with an informative overview of the need for the project that recognizes both the importance of access provided for by ANILCA to residents of southeast Alaska and the challenges associated with maintaining such an extensive road system. We also appreciate the comprehensive *Priority Schedule*, which provides detailed information about the various routes, conditions and uses, including subsistence. Taken as a whole, the EA appears to provide the public with sufficient information to assist the Districts with this important decision regarding access to subsistence resources and other uses, as well as provide a substantive accounting of proposed closures pursuant to ANILCA, Section 811(b).

Given the overall level of coordination that occurred during this planning process with the State, we have few substantive comments. The following comments are primarily

informative or technical in nature. In some instances we request inclusion of additional information or clarification in the final decision document.

Subsistence

While the EA thoroughly discusses the Federal Subsistence Program, its relationship to state management is often not included. The State of Alaska is responsible for the sustainability of fish and wildlife and provides for general and subsistence hunting on all lands in Alaska – regardless of ownership – unless specifically superseded by federal law. Federal subsistence regulations only supersede state regulation when determined necessary to implement the federal subsistence priority as provided in ANILCA. Furthermore, the presence of federal subsistence regulations does not preclude state authorized harvest unless specifically superseded by restrictions authorized by ANILCA. For example, the State of Alaska provides for the harvest of four bucks in game management unit 2 from Aug. 1 – Dec. 31, subject to federal restrictions. Since it is important for the public to understand that the harvest of fish and wildlife on federal lands, including for subsistence, is not limited to the federal subsistence program, we request such a clarification in the final decision document.

Stream Crossings

As stated in the ATM, through the Road Condition Survey and Upstream Assessment processes; stream crossings on system roads have been identified and given a status of Red, Green, or Gray. A prioritization process began in 2004 to determine which stream crossing structures needed removal/replacement. We appreciate the ATM provides the information necessary to complete the prioritization process. We anticipate this group will reconvene to finalize this process and expect to hear from the Districts in that regard in the near future.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Habitat looks forward to working with the Forest Service to reach concurrence prior to conduct of Service activities in fish bearing waters. As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding¹ (MOU) between the Habitat Division and the Forest Service, state habitat biologists will coordinate with District staff to confirm best management practices are applied at each crossing, including:

- conducting instream activities to avoid sensitive fish life stages
- immediately stabilizing disturbed stream banks to prevent erosion and sedimentation
- using materials treated with preservatives that do not contain creosote or pentachlorophenol for structures that cross fresh water

The MOU also calls for cooperation in updating the Catalog of Waters Important for the Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes by providing nominations to the Catalog. We urge District field staff to submit nominations for the annual updates. For additional information on this process or to coordinate fieldwork associated with specific crossings please contact Mark Minnillo, Area Habitat Biologist (907) 826-2560 or mark.minnillo@alaska.gov.

¹ 04MOU-111011-094

Wildlife

We appreciate the Districts' willingness to incorporate ADF&G staff recommendations into the EA and we look forward to continued cooperation on future projects.

Page 46, Abundance and Distribution of Deer, second paragraph, third sentence: The potential supply available for subsistence use is not based on total population but rather the harvestable surplus as determined by ADF&G. Additionally, a subsistence restriction must exist if the number of harvested deer necessary for subsistence uses exceeds the harvestable surplus of the population. While we recognize this does not alter the general conclusion in the 810 analysis, we request a clarification in the decision document or errata sheet, as follows.

As determined by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the harvestable surplus of this population ~~This is the potential supply available for subsistence use. A significant possibility of a subsistence restriction exists if the amount of harvested deer necessary for subsistence uses exceed the harvestable surplus of the population demand for deer exceeds the supply.~~

Page 52, first paragraph, last sentence: It appears information in the referenced report may have been misinterpreted. ADF&G is not in favor of increasing wolf harvest by 12 percent; rather they anticipate this may be the effect of a longer federal hunting and trapping season on reported wolf harvest. Please refer to the May 4, 2009 letter to the Forest Supervisor for a complete explanation. In light of this, we request a clarification in the final decision document or errata sheet:

...Alaska Fish and Game Department expects an ~~hopes to increase the in reported~~ annual harvest by an estimated 12 percent (Porter 2006).

This comment also applies on page 88 and 90 where the language is similar.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We look forward to future opportunities to work with the Districts when the Motor Vehicle Use Maps undergo annual review.

Sincerely,



Susan E. Magee
ANILCA Project Coordinator

cc: Sally Gibert, ANILCA Program Coordinator