



United States Department of Agriculture

Wrangell Island Project

Record of Decision DRAFT



Forest Service
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest
Wrangell Ranger District

R10-MB-634c

July 2017

Cover Photo: Pat Valley, Wrangell Island. Photograph by Andrea Slusser

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File Code: 1950
Date: July 10, 2017

Dear Planning Participant:

I am pleased to announce the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and draft Record of Decision (ROD) for the Wrangell Island Project are available for review at the Ketchikan Forest Supervisor's Office, the Wrangell District Office, and online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>. Hardcopies and digital copies of the documents are available upon request.

The draft decision documents my intent to select Alternative 2 from the FEIS, to make about 56 million board feet of sawlog and utility timber available for harvest from about 4,767 acres of commercial forest land on Wrangell Island. Timber harvest will be by partial cut and clearcut. About 16.8 miles of National Forest System road construction, 4.4 miles of road reconditioning, and 9.9 miles of temporary road construction would be required to harvest the timber.

The Wrangell Island Project draft ROD is being made available for public review prior to the final decision. Please see the section "Administrative Review - Opportunity to Object" for information on filing an objection at the end of the ROD. More information on the pre-decisional objection process can also be found at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/objections/index.php>.

Under the 36 CFR 218 objection process, the public will be notified of the availability of the draft ROD through a legal notice published in the newspaper of record, the Ketchikan Daily News, starting the 45-day objection filing period. A copy of the legal notice will also be posted on the Wrangell Island Project website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>.

If objections are received during the 45-day objection filing period, a 45-day administrative review period will begin during which time the Reviewing Officer, the Responsible Official, and any objectors may attempt to resolve concerns, with the goal of achieving a better, more-informed decision. The ROD will be signed after any concerns and instructions identified by the Reviewing Officer in the objection response have been addressed. A final decision on projects subject to the objection process may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the objection filing period, if no objections are received (36 CFR 218.12(c)(2)).

Copies of this letter have been distributed to those people and organizations on the project mailing list.

For additional information, please contact Robert Dalrymple, Wrangell District Ranger, at (907) 874-2323. I want to thank you for your interest in the Wrangell Island Project.

Sincerely,

M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor, Tongass NF



Wrangell Island Project

Record of Decision DRAFT

United States Department of Agriculture

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Abstract

The Responsible Official intends to select Alternative 2 from the Wrangell Island Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) as the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative makes about 56 million board feet of sawlog and utility timber available for harvest from about 4,767 acres of National Forest System land on Wrangell Island to contribute to the Tongass National Forest timber sale program. Both partial cut harvest and clearcut harvest methods will be used. To accomplish this timber harvest, approximately 16.8 miles of National Forest System road and 9.9 miles of temporary road will be constructed and 4.4 miles of system road will be reconditioned.

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Record of Decision DRAFT

Wrangell Island Project

USDA Forest Service

Wrangell Ranger District, Tongass National Forest, Alaska Region

Introduction

This draft Record of Decision (ROD) is being made available for review under the project level pre-decisional administrative review, or “objection process” (Title 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B). The objection process gives eligible individuals and entities the opportunity to voice concerns and file objections with the Reviewing Officer and Responsible Official prior to the final ROD.

This draft Record of Decision documents my decision to select Alternative 2 (hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative) from the Wrangell Island Project FEIS. The ROD contains a summary of the environmental analysis completed for this project and the rationale for my decision. It also contains my findings required by law and prior to the final ROD.

The Selected Alternative will make approximately 56 million board feet of sawlog and utility timber available for harvest from about 4,767 acres of National Forest System land on Wrangell Island (in its entirety Wrangell Island is the project area) to contribute to the Tongass National Forest timber sale program. The harvest of this timber will require construction of about 16.8 miles of National Forest System (NFS) road, and construction of about 9.9 miles of temporary road. It also proposes reconditioning 4.4 miles of existing NFS road. Approximately 0.2 mile of NFS road will be decommissioned and an additional 15.9 miles of NFS road will be closed to public motorized use. Approximately 86.0 miles of NFS road and 14.5 miles of motorized trail will remain open for public use. See the Selected Alternative map (figure 2), and Selected Alternative Access Management map (figure 3).

Decision

Based upon my review of public comments, the analysis contained in the FEIS, the project record, and the recently implemented 2016 Forest Plan, I intend to select Alternative 2 as the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative is displayed in figure 2 and figure 3 in this draft Record of Decision.

I am incorporating the project design features and measures to minimize adverse environmental effects of the Selected Alternative as part of my decision. These are described generally in chapter 2 of the FEIS and site-specifically in the unit cards and road cards (appendices 1 and 2 of this draft ROD, which are located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). I am satisfied that these are practicable and effective in avoiding or minimizing environmental effects. I have found them to be effective when implemented elsewhere on the Forest.

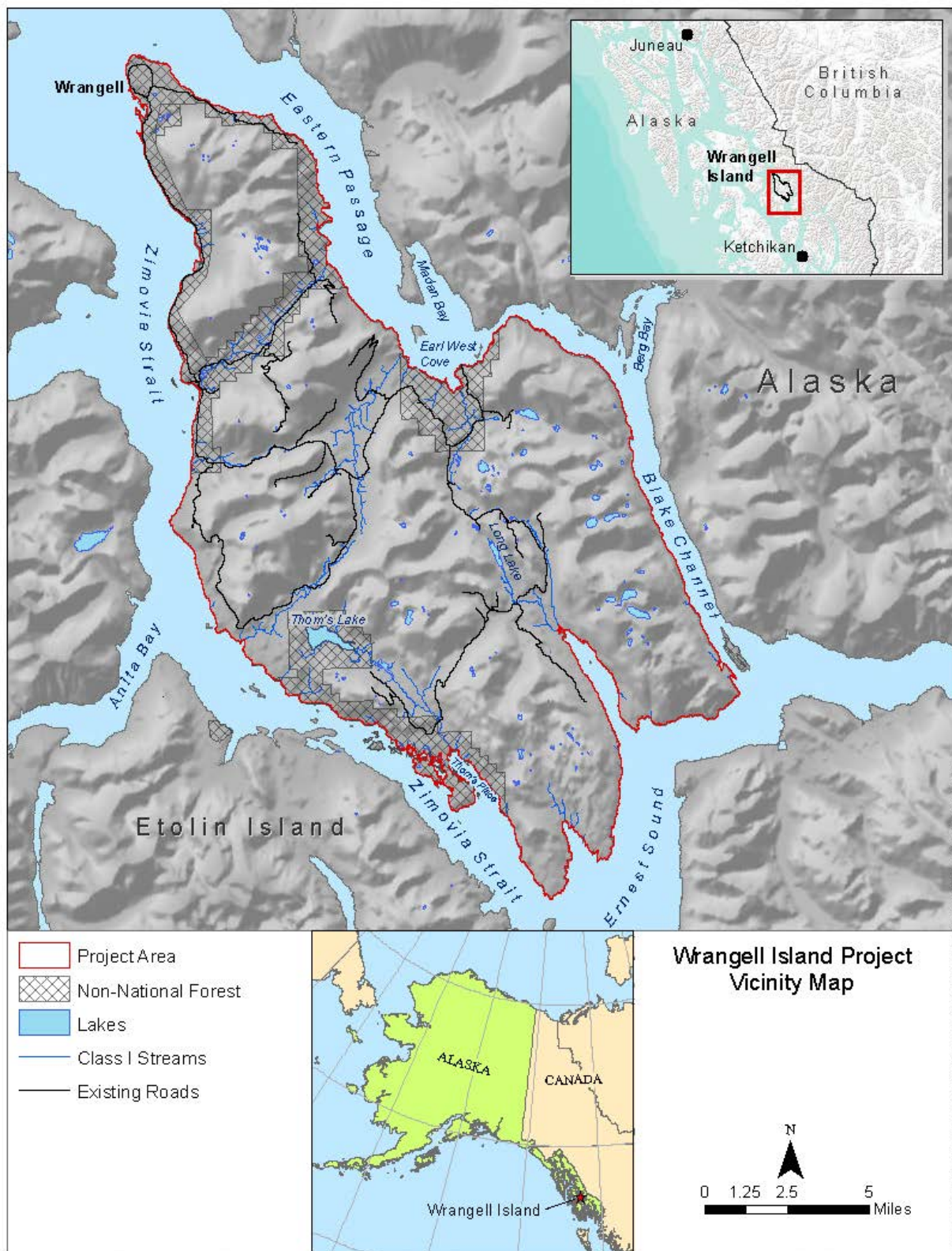


Figure 1. Wrangell Island Project vicinity map

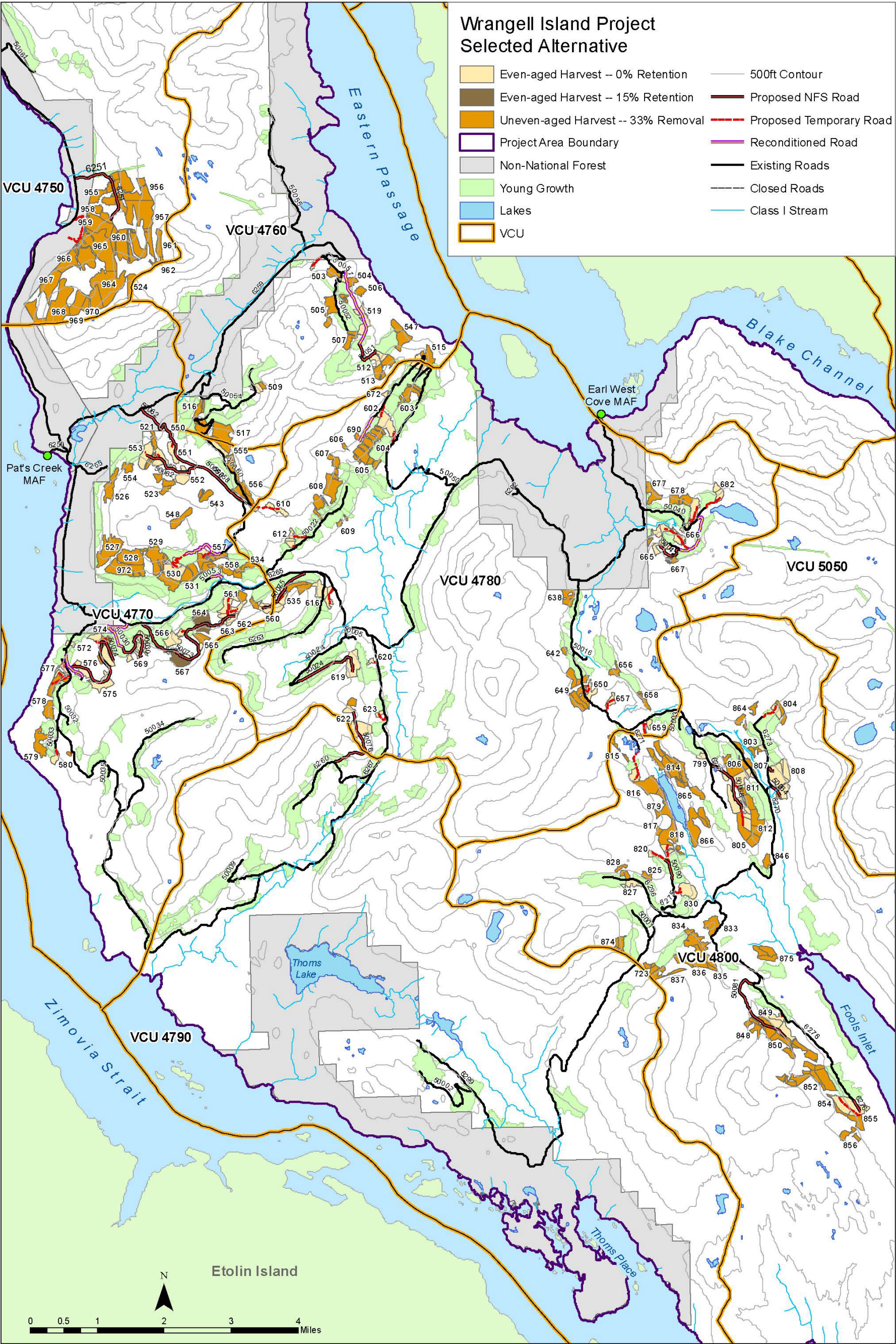


Figure 2. Selected Alternative for the Wrangell Island Project

Features of the Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative is designed to provide the greatest supply of timber volume for the timber industry, while protecting scenic quality, old-growth habitat and wildlife habitat connectivity.

The Selected Alternative proposes even-aged and uneven-aged timber harvest on suitable lands, and the construction of new and temporary roads. It also proposes road management objectives which define public motorized access.

The Selected Alternative is designed to harvest timber in the Timber Production and Modified Landscape land use designations (LUDs). This alternative provides timber volume opportunities for both large and small sales within the suitable land base under the 2016 Forest Plan. This alternative includes harvest in the mill basin area, and near Long Lake. This alternative addresses Issue 1 (Timber Economics) by providing the greatest timber volume from which to offer individual timber sales. It also addresses Issue 4 (Access Management) by providing the most motorized public access following harvest.

The Selected Alternative is summarized in table 1 and illustrated in figure 2 and figure 3.

Timber Harvest: The Selected Alternative will produce an estimated 56 MMBF of old-growth saw/utility timber volume from approximately 4,767 acres. Silvicultural prescriptions include approximately 3,359 acres of uneven-aged management (partial harvest) and 1,408 acres of even-aged management (clearcut) using conventional cable, shovel, and helicopter logging systems. The partial harvest systems are designed to retain at least 67 percent of the stand's basal area to protect the scenic value, but also to reduce negative effects to wildlife. Where there are no safety or resource concerns, this alternative will allow for limited, short-term public access to gather firewood from temporary roads once timber harvest activities are complete. No young-growth harvest is included in the project.

Roads: The Selected Alternative will construct 16.8 miles of new NFS roads and 9.9 miles of temporary roads. It will also recondition 4.4 miles of existing NFS roads. All temporary roads will be decommissioned after activities are complete. Existing marine access facilities at Pats Creek and Earl West may be used.

Motorized Access Management: The motorized access management proposed in this alternative was developed through a collaborative process between the IDT and the Wrangell Borough. The process identified the roads associated with the alternative that are the most important to the community for subsistence and recreation access. Then the roads were evaluated based on resource protection needs and future maintenance costs. Alternative 2 proposes closing 15.9 miles of existing and proposed NFS road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile. Approximately 86 miles of NFS road would be available for public motorized access, of which 14.5 miles would be restricted to motorized trail use.

Table 1. Summary table of the selected alternative for the Wrangell Island Project

Measure	Selected Alternative
BASIC PROJECT DATA	
Timber Harvest (acres)	4,767
Volume of Harvest (MMBF)	56
TIMBER SUPPLY	
Timber Volume (MBF)	
Sawtimber	50,885
Utility	4,885
Total Net Volume	55,770
Logging System (acres)	
Cable	998
Shovel	528
Helicopter	3,241
Total Harvest Acres	4,767
SILVICULTURE	
Silvicultural system and harvest method	
Uneven-aged Management – Single tree selection (removal of up to 33% of basal area) (acres)	
Shovel	118
Helicopter	3,241
Even-aged Management – Clearcut (acres)	
Cable/Shovel	1,340
Clearcut with reserves (acres)	
Cable/Shovel	68
Helicopter	0
Total Acres Harvested	4,767
Timber Volume by Species (MBF)	
Sitka spruce	11,195
Hemlock	26,460
Western redcedar	4,071
Yellow-cedar	9,159
ACCESS MANAGEMENT	
NFS road construction (miles)	16.8
Temp road construction (miles)	9.9
Road reconditioning (miles)	4.4
Estimated total road costs (in millions of dollars)	\$4.5
NFS Road Designations, following implementation (total, island-wide)	
Open to all vehicles (miles)	86.0
Motorized trails (miles)	14.5
Closed to public motorized use (miles)	15.9
NFS roads to be decommissioned (miles)	0.2

Rationale for the Decision

I believe it is important to clearly explain why I intend to select Alternative 2.

I considered a combination of factors in making my decision:

- I looked at how each alternative responded to the Purpose and Need for the project.
- I considered how each alternative addressed the key issues developed from scoping.
- I reviewed the environmental effects of each alternative.
- I reviewed and considered the public comments to see how the alternatives responded to the issues and management concerns raised by the public other agencies, and the interdisciplinary team members.
- I verified that the decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as well as applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

A detailed discussion of how each of these factors were considered is presented below.

Purpose and Need

I looked at how each alternative responded to the Purpose and Need for action (described in the FEIS chapter 1) of meeting the Timber Goals and Objectives and the Economic Goals and Objectives of the Forest Plan offering a supply of timber for harvest to meet the needs of the industry. The Purpose is to respond to the Timber, Economic, and other goals and objectives of the Forest Plan and help move the project area toward the desired conditions. The Need is to meet the requirements of TTRA to seek to meet the market demand.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative best meets the Purpose and Need within Forest Plan direction for timber volume and economic opportunities. It will produce a supply of timber for the timber industry while minimizing effects to the environment. The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects from project activities are consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan.

The Selected Alternative will:

- Contribute an estimated 56 MMBF of timber to meet the annual and planning cycle market demand for Tongass National Forest timber in an orderly flow to large and small timber purchasers, mill operators, and value-added wood product industries in Southeast Alaska.
- Benefit the local and regional economies of Wrangell and Southeast Alaska by providing opportunities for resource uses to maintain and enhance local timber processing capacity.
- Support a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities within Wrangell and other Southeast Alaska communities.
- Manage the timber resource for production of sawtimber and other timber products from suitable forest lands made available for timber harvest, on an even-flow, long-term sustained yield basis and in an economically efficient manner while also improving forest resource conditions.
- Provide a supply of “bridge” timber that would support local jobs and facilitate the industry transition to a sustainable wood product industry based on young-growth management on the Tongass National Forest.

Key Issues

An important consideration in making my decision is how each alternative addressed the key issues developed from input received during project scoping. After carefully reviewing the key issues (FEIS chapter 1), I find that the Selected Alternative best addresses these key issues when considered as a whole.

Issue 1: Timber Supply and Timber Sale Economics

The forest products industry has been a part of Wrangell Island and the Southeast Alaska economy since the 1950s. While the forest products industry is a fraction of what it once was, it is still an important contributor to the economy and important in economic diversification. Both the timber supply and the associated economic effects produced from National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island affect the stability of Southeast Alaska's forest products industry and the ability of the industry to provide employment and contribute to the local and regional economies. The timber industry in Southeast Alaska includes large and small timber purchasers, mill operators, and value-added wood product industries that are dependent upon a reliable supply of timber.

I considered the need to manage the timber resource in the Wrangell Island Project area in order to produce an even flow of timber on an economical basis from the Tongass National Forest. The Selected Alternative provides the most timber volume, about 56 MMBF, toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand. This timber volume will be offered in a variety of sale sizes to meet the needs of both large and small operators.

The Selected Alternative will contribute timber volume to meet industry needs. Although there is currently no young-growth timber mature enough for economical harvest in the Wrangell Island Project area, the Selected Alternative contributes to the supply of "bridge" timber needed to maintain the timber industry during the transition to young-growth management. A reliable supply of economically viable timber is critical to maintain the expertise and infrastructure of the existing timber industry during the transition.

I evaluated the concerns for providing for economical timber sale offerings within the context of fluctuating timber markets, the amount of timber volume currently available for offer from the Tongass National Forest, and the relative environmental effects of the Selected Alternative, and find that the Selected Alternative provides the best balance overall. The results of the financial efficiency modeling indicate a deficit value based on past market performance for all alternatives. While the Selected Alternative is not the most economical alternative, because it requires the highest amount of helicopter yarding, it produces the most timber volume. Under the current limited export policy, the indicated advertised rate is negative \$59.23/net MBF for the Selected Alternative and negative \$220.64/net MBF under the 100 percent domestic processing scenario.

Economic and timber market conditions continue to fluctuate dramatically. The financial efficiency analysis model used for the Wrangell Island Project relies on past values and costs and can only provide a relative comparison of values between the alternatives as a whole. It cannot predict market conditions at the time of offer for a particular sale, since timber markets and values are extremely volatile. The actual economic values of timber from the project will not be known until the timber sales, which are offered by competitive bid, are awarded to the highest bidder. These timber sales must have a positive appraisal value before they can be advertised for sale.

The Selected Alternative could support an estimated 222 annualized jobs, including logging, sawmilling, transportation and other services. Of the action alternatives, it provides the highest timber volume and supports the highest number of jobs.

The NFS roads built under the Selected Alternative will also become part of the infrastructure necessary to manage the young growth in the future.

Issue 2: Wildlife Habitat

The FEIS disclosed the possible adverse effects of each alternative on wildlife habitat. These effects will be mitigated or reduced through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including best management practices. Site-specific mitigation measures are listed on the unit and road cards (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>).

Many commenters expressed concern that timber harvest would reduce old-growth forest habitat in the project area, thereby reducing the preferred habitat for old-growth associated species. I carefully assessed these direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat in making my Decision.

While Alternative 5 has the least overall effect on wildlife habitat of the action alternatives, I find the Selected Alternative finds the best balance in meeting timber volume needs while also minimizing the effects to wildlife habitat from timber harvest. The extensive use of partial harvest in the Selected Alternative, will substantially reduce adverse effects to wildlife. Approximately 70 percent of the harvest area in the Selected Alternative will be partially harvested using a single-tree selection prescription, where 33 percent or less of the basal area of the stand is removed. This prescription leaves 67 percent or more of the stand remaining to provide habitat components and retain old-growth characteristics within the stand. Sixty-eight percent of the harvest area will use helicopter yarding which also eliminates the need for temporary roads and their associated impacts. Harvest unit design incorporated provisions for elevational travel corridors where possible. Known or suspected heron rookeries or raptor nests will be protected with no-harvest buffers.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative maintains enough old-growth forest to provide the full range of matrix functions in order to meet the Tongass Conservation Strategy on Wrangell Island. Old-growth wildlife habitat will be maintained within T77 VCU 4790, the 2001 inventoried roadless areas, and the old-growth reserves on Wrangell Island. There will be adequate habitat connectivity on Wrangell Island (see figure 4).

The analysis included an assessment of old-growth reserve boundaries on Wrangell Island and possible modifications to them. This included a report with a recommendation from an interagency team of wildlife biologists for a biologically preferred change to increase the size and provide more connectivity to the Fools and Thom's Medium old-growth reserves. I find that the existing old-growth reserves, by themselves, provide the necessary reserve habitat on Wrangell Island to meet the Tongass Conservation Strategy. Now, however, Wrangell Island has even more protected habitat with the 2001 inventoried roadless area designations, and VCU 4790, as a T77 Watershed and The Nature Conservancy / Audubon conservation priority area. Over 75 percent of the NFS land on Wrangell Island is now protected from development and will continue to provide wildlife habitat. Figure 4 illustrates the protected areas in relation to the areas available for harvest.

I have determined that the decision will not have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any migratory bird species in the project area. There may be moderate direct effects on individuals or small groups and their nests from the harvest of timber or the disturbance caused by harvest and related activities. Goshawk surveys were conducted and known nest and probable nest locations were protected with no-harvest buffers to comply with Forest Plan. Should other raptor nests or great blue heron rookeries be discovered during implementation, they will be protected.

The Selected Alternative will have minimal to no impact on Threatened, Endangered, or Alaska Region Sensitive species. The Biological Assessment findings for humpback whale is "Not likely to adversely affect". The Biological Evaluation findings for goshawk, as a sensitive species, is "May adversely affect individuals but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the planning area nor cause a trend toward federal listing". Detailed information is in the Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment and is summarized in the FEIS, chapter 3.

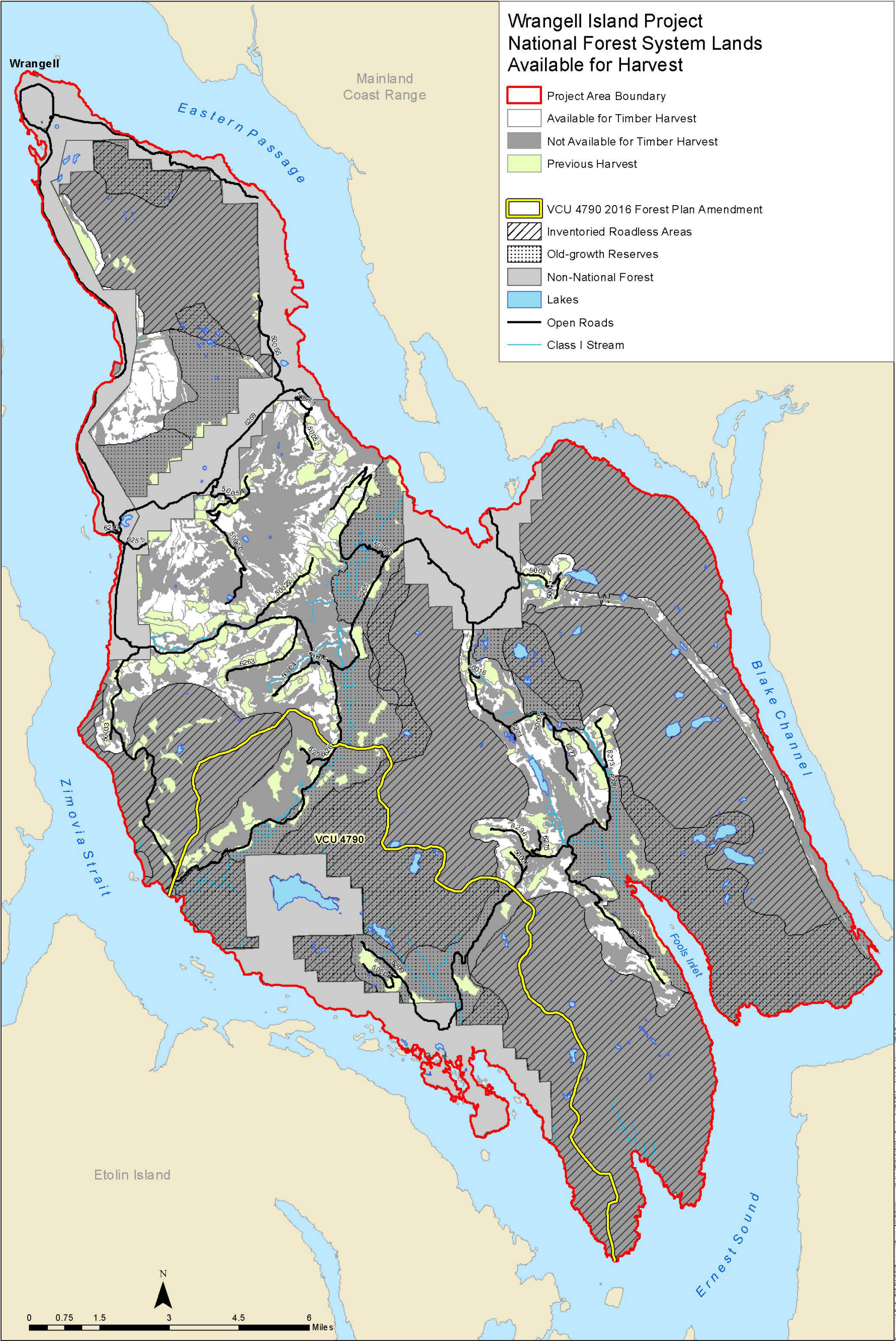


Figure 4. National Forest System lands available for timber harvest as established by the 2016 Forest Plan

The Selected Alternative and the other action alternatives will have minimal effect on the management indicator species. The estimates of effects are related to the acres of harvested habitat. No change in the existing trend for any management indicator species is anticipated. The amount of partial harvest in the Selected Alternative is expected to reduce the effect on these species.

Deer, wolves, goshawks, and marten were identified as species of special interest by the Forest Service, the public and wildlife agencies.

Deer habitat: Deer are habitat generalists but the habitat used in the winter is the most limiting factor when discussing habitat needs. The Selected Alternative will have the most effect of the action alternatives on deer habitat but it is relatively minor. Deer modelling indicates that on National Forest System lands, the Selected Alternative will reduce the deer habitat capability (which is a theoretical number of deer that habitat is expected to support) by less than approximately 8 percent from the existing condition at the time of stem exclusion. It would reduce deep-snow winter habitat (high-volume POG below 800 feet elevation on south-facing aspects) by less than 2 percent, reduce the average winter habitat (all POG below 1,500 feet in elevation) by less than 9 percent, and reduce the non-winter habitat by less than 1 percent from the existing condition. The cumulative reduction in deer habitat capability would be approximately 22 percent from historical condition on all land ownerships in the analysis area at time of stem exclusion. The reduction in deep-snow winter habitat would be reduced by 34 percent of historical condition, the reduction in average winter habitat would be reduced by 25 percent, and the reduction in the non-winter habitat would be reduced by 5 percent from the historic condition. The deer modelling treats all timber harvest as though it were clearcut whereas single-tree selection partial harvest may actually be applied. Therefore, in the Selected Alternative, impacts are not expected to be as severe in the single-tree selection units as the deer model predicts, because 67 percent or more of a stand's pre-harvest basal area would be maintained. Ninety-one percent or more of the deer habitat on National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island (POG) would remain after the Selected Alternative is implemented.

Wolves: Wolves are habitat generalists but productive old growth provides habitat for their prey. Deer density derived from habitat modelling is used to measure effects of timber harvest and road density is used to measure potential adverse effects from human access for trapping and hunting wolves. Of the action alternatives, the Selected Alternative would have the most effect on wolves but all effects are expected to be minor. The current deer density on National Forest System lands in the project area is 12.8 deer/mi². Under the Selected Alternative, the deer density is estimated to decrease by 1 deer/mi² to 11.8 deer/mi². The road density below 1,200 feet is estimated to increase by 0.2 mi/mi² from the existing condition on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, deer density would decrease to 10.0 deer/mi² and road density would increase to 1.3 mi/mi².

Wolf mortality: No wolf mortality concerns have been identified in GMU 3, which includes Wrangell Island.

Goshawk nesting habitat: The Biological Evaluation for goshawks determined that the Selected Alternative may adversely affect individuals but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the planning area nor cause a trend toward Federal listing. Of the action alternatives, the Selected Alternative has the most effect on goshawks because it harvests the most acres. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 8 percent from the existing condition and reduce the high-volume productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by less than 12 percent on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 21 percent from historic conditions and reduce the high-volume productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 39 percent.

All known goshawk nests are protected by the Forest Plan standard and guideline that requires 100-acre no timber harvest zone around the nest (2016 Forest Plan, WILD4 II C, p. 4-95). All other areas where goshawks were detected but no nests were found are protected by a no-harvest buffer.

Marten habitat: Habitat requirements for martens reflect a strong interaction between food, cover, climate, predation, with forest cover being particularly important for travel, dens, resting sites, hunting, and avoiding inclement weather, so habitat below 1,500 feet in elevation is more important in the winter. The Selected Alternative has the most effect on marten habitat of the action alternatives because it harvests the most acres. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 8 percent from the existing condition and reduce the productive old-growth habitat at elevations lower than 1,500 feet in elevation by less than 12 percent on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 39 percent from historic conditions.

Wrangell southern red-backed vole habitat: The Wrangell southern red-backed vole was identified as a concern by some commenters. It is considered an endemic mammal, currently known only to occur on Wrangell and Sergief Islands. A southern red-backed vole was also detected on Etolin Island but has not been categorized into a subspecies. There is a limited understanding of the populations and habitat of the Wrangell southern red-backed vole but old-growth habitat was used as indicator to estimate the effects from timber harvest. The Selected Alternative would have the most effect on the southern red-backed vole because it harvests the most acres. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat by an estimated 8 percent from the existing condition on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 21 percent from historic conditions.

Issue 3: Scenic Quality

Scenic quality was a key issue in the analysis. The proposed timber harvest, combined with past and reasonably foreseeable timber harvest, could affect scenic integrity from visual priority travel routes and use areas identified in the Forest Plan, and in areas of particular scenic importance to the community of Wrangell.

The concern for maintaining scenic quality in the analysis area was one of the driving factors used in designing the harvest units and developing the alternatives. The Forest Plan established scenic integrity objectives for all the visual priority routes in the project area. In order to meet the scenic integrity objectives, partial harvest, rather than clearcut, was proposed in visually sensitive areas.

While Alternative 5 has the least potential adverse effect to visual quality because it has the fewest acres harvested and the least amount of road construction, I find that the Selected Alternative provides the necessary scenic quality protection while also providing the most timber volume toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand. Approximately 70 percent of the harvest area in the Selected Alternative will be partially harvested using a single-tree selection prescription where only 33 percent or less of the basal area of the stand will be removed. This leaves 67 percent or more remaining which will continue to provide the visual characteristics of an old-growth stand. All timber harvest in the Selected Alternative will meet the scenic integrity objectives. The scenic effects from harvest were of special concern in the mill basin, Long Lake, and Highbush Lake areas. The use of partial harvest will be only slightly evident to the average viewer in these areas.

Issue 4: Access Management

Roads and road access were a key issue in the analysis. Public motorized access is an important concern for many Wrangell residents who expressed concerns that the roads involved in the project will be closed limiting their access to subsistence resources and recreation opportunities on the National Forest. The

public uses the roads for subsistence hunting and gathering of firewood, timber, berries and other subsistence resources.

The City and Borough of Wrangell worked with the IDT to develop the access management proposed in the Selected Alternative. When assessing whether to close each road or keep it open to public motorized access after timber harvest activities were completed, the IDT considered the subsistence, hunting, and recreation values of keeping roads open to the public against the maintenance costs of keeping roads open, and the potential impacts of open roads to soils, water quality, fish, and wildlife.

The Selected Alternative provides the most public motorized access of the action alternatives. While the Selected Alternative will close a total of approximately 15.9 miles of NFS road to public motorized use (existing and proposed) and will decommission 0.2 mile of NFS road, approximately 86.0 miles of NFS road and 14.5 miles of trail will remain open for public motorized use, as shown on the Selected Alternative Access Management map (figure 3). All temporary roads will be decommissioned and allowed to revegetate.

I find that the access management in the Selected Alternative provides the best balance between providing motorized access to the public while considering maintenance costs and protecting the forest resources. It is the minimum road system necessary to achieve the multiple use objectives of this alternative.

Other Environmental Effects

The analysis documented in the FEIS disclosed the possible adverse effects of implementing the actions proposed under each alternative. These effects were mitigated or reduced through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including best management practices. Specific mitigation measures are listed on the unit cards and road cards in appendices 1 and 2, which are located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). These are also discussed in FEIS chapters 2 and 3 and summarized in table 2 of the Wrangell Island Project FEIS.

I considered the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives in making my decision. Alternative 5 creates the least overall environmental effects of the action alternatives because it proposes the least amount of timber harvest and road construction. However, I find that the Selected Alternative provides the best balance between providing an adequate supply of timber and minimizing the overall environmental effects from the timber harvest. The FEIS and project record display the effects, both positive and negative, resulting from the action alternatives.

While I reviewed all of the resource effects in addition to the key issues, the public raised some specific concerns, which I will address below. More information on these effects is summarized in the FEIS.

Yellow-cedar decline in Alaska: There is concern for yellow-cedar decline in Alaska and the regeneration and persistence of yellow-cedar in stands where it is present. There is a petition currently under review by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to list yellow-cedar under the Endangered Species Act. The scientific understanding of this species is still developing as additional research results become available. A recent article by T.M. Barrett and R.R. Pattison published by NRC Research Press September 27, 2016 found that yellow-cedar may be increasing across its range, despite its decline in some parts of Southeast Alaska. I have examined the silvicultural prescriptions and determined that appropriate measures are provided by the Selected Alternative to ensure establishment of yellow-cedar in regenerated stands where appropriate. Recent research publications regarding yellow-cedar decline have been considered and are included in the project record.

Aquatic effects: I considered the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Selected Alternative combined with past harvest on the aquatics resources. While Alternative 5 has the least overall effect on fish habitat of the action alternatives, I find the Selected Alternative finds the best balance in meeting timber volume needs while also minimizing the effects to water quality and fish habitat from timber

harvest. The project design and implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and buffers will limit the effects to the watersheds and fisheries habitat.

Soil stability: While Alternative 5 has the least potential adverse effect to the resource because it has the fewest acres harvested and the least amount of road construction, I find that the Selected Alternative provides the necessary soils protection while also providing the most timber volume toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand. The effects to soils from the Selected Alternative will be minimized by the project design and the implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines and best management practices. All areas with slopes greater than 72 percent will have a site stability analysis prior to implementation, and unstable slopes will be avoided or addressed through geotechnical design to minimize adverse impacts to soil and water resources.

Plants: While the Selected Alternative has the most potential effect on plants due to the number of acres of potential disturbance from timber harvest and road construction, the effects are expected to be minor. There may be minor effects to one rare plant and five of the listed Alaska Region sensitive plants. The risk of adverse impacts to inundated clubmoss, a Region 10 rare plant, is low to moderate.

The Biological Evaluation determination of effects is that Selected Alternative “May affect” individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for edible thistle, mountain lady’s slipper, Calder’s lovage, Alaska rein orchid, and lesser round-leaved orchid. Detailed information is in the Plant Biological Evaluation and summarized in the FEIS, chapter 3. The action alternatives avoid all known occurrences of the sensitive plant species.

Measures described in the Unit Cards (appendix 1) will be implemented to reduce the possibility of invasive plant species that may compete with native species.

Climate change: Climate change is an important consideration, however, the magnitude of this project is so small compared to the factors that contribute to climate change that foreseeable effects would be immeasurably small for all alternatives and would not contribute to a meaningful choice among the alternatives. The Forest Plan FEIS discusses climate change factors and discloses the risk of possible effects. The Tongass National Forest will continue to monitor potential effects of climate change through the existing Forest Plan monitoring programs, and other studies that are occurring regionally and nationally.

Recreation: While recreation occurs throughout the project area and recreation sites are interspersed in areas with timber harvest, the adverse effects to recreation are expected to be minor. Implementation of the Selected Alternative would not noticeably decrease or change the current recreational opportunities. Past timber harvest has provided access and views from recreation sites. The primary effects to recreation users will be effects to the scenery. Partial harvest of timber (removing 33 percent or less of a stand’s basal area), and unit design is being used along visual priority routes and recreation sites to minimize the effects on scenery and recreation. Recreational driving is one of the most popular activities on Wrangell Island. The Selected Alternative provides the most miles of road and motorized trail available for public use.

Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Exchange: Congress enacted an exchange of lands between the Alaska Mental Health Trust and the USDA Forest Service. As a result, approximately 1,071 acres of land on Wrangell Island will become part of the National Forest. The legislation contains specific provisions that lands transferred to the Forest Service will be managed to preserve its undeveloped natural character, and provide for recreational opportunities. The exchange will have overall beneficial effects for the resources of Wrangell Island, when it is completed, in several years’ time.

Public Comments

I want to thank the individuals, organizations and agencies that participated and provided comments for this analysis. I want to especially acknowledge the City and Borough of Wrangell, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their cooperative work in developing the alternatives and providing information for this project.

I have carefully considered the comments. The input was valuable to me in identifying issues, creating alternatives for this project, and making a more-informed decision. I have reviewed the many public and agency comments we received during this analysis and the responses to those comments provided in the FEIS appendix B.

In making my Decision, I considered the proposals made by commenters. Some of these were incorporated into the alternatives and others were considered but eliminated from further study. These are documented in chapter 2 of the FEIS. There are also some general categories of comments I want to address specifically. These are addressed in the paragraphs below.

Timber economics was a concern of many commenters, and I share that concern. The timber market conditions fluctuate dramatically over time. The current market conditions are very poor and are driven by international markets. The Selected Alternative's economic assessment indicates a negative advertised rate for the alternative as a whole. By law, the timber cannot be advertised for sale unless it appraises positively so the actual timber values of individual sales from this project will not be known until the sales are advertised and awarded to the highest successful bidder. However, it is important to have the timber from this project available to offer when the market conditions change. The timber industry in Southeast Alaska needs a reliable source of timber in order to survive and I am selecting the alternative that provides the greatest timber volume while minimizing the environmental impacts from the timber harvest. There were requests to drop environmental protections in order to improve timber economics but I feel those protection measures are effective and necessary.

The volume of timber being made available to industry was also a concern. I am selecting the alternative that provides the most timber volume because the timber will provide a greater timber supply to meet the needs of the timber industry and serves as "bridge" timber to facilitate the Tongass National Forest transition to young-growth harvest. That timber volume will also provide more benefit to the local and regional economies. The Selected Alternative will provide for the most jobs, which is especially important to those smaller communities where the timber industry is located. The State and Southeast region economy is currently in a downward trend and additional jobs are especially important. The January 2017 Economic Trends report published by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development provides the most recent snapshot of economic conditions and employment forecasts in the State.

There were comments requesting access to firewood, a subsistence resource. To address the request, I will allow limited, short-term public access to gather firewood from along temporary roads once timber harvest activities are complete if there are no safety or resource concerns. These firewood gathering opportunities will be posted at the Wrangell Ranger District Office. All temporary roads will be decommissioned and allowed to revegetate after activities are complete.

There were many comments on effects to wildlife. I feel that the Selected Alternative design and protection measures will minimize the effects to wildlife from timber harvest. While some may consider the amount of harvest to be too large, the Selected Alternative affects only a small portion of Wrangell Island. The Selected Alternative will clearcut about 1 percent and will partially harvest about 3 percent of NFS lands on Wrangell Island. The partial harvest systems are designed to retain at least 67 percent of the stand's basal area, in part to reduce negative effects to wildlife. Over 60 percent of the NFS lands on the island will remain undeveloped and will continue to provide wildlife habitat. These areas are protected by 2001 inventoried roadless areas, old-growth reserves, T77 VCU 4790, beach fringe and riparian zones.

Figure 4 displays the areas protected from development along with the limited area available for timber harvest.

To address the US Fish and Wildlife Service concerns of timber harvest in deep-snow winter habitat, the Forest Service will conduct a joint post-harvest assessment with the USFWS on the effects on deer in the harvest units containing deep-snow winter habitat.

There were comments on the effects of timber harvest and road building on the other forest resources. I find that the Selected Alternative will minimize the environmental effects through alternative design and the use of best management practices (BMPs), Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures.

There were many comments in support of and in opposition to public motorized access on the roads following timber harvest. I find that the Selected Alternative best meets the desires of the community of Wrangell by providing some public motorized access while closing other roads for environmental and economic reasons. Public road access is closely tied to subsistence use in the rural subsistence communities such as Wrangell.

Many comments were on topics analyzed at the Forest Plan level, such as regional policies on export, regional market demand calculations, viability of wildlife species and interpretation of law which are considered outside the scope of this project analysis. These topics were analyzed in the 1997 Forest Plan revision and the 2008 and 2016 amendments to that revision.

Consistency with the Forest Plan and other Applicable Laws and Regulations

As the Responsible Official, it is my responsibility, prior to making a decision, to ensure that this project is consistent with the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other applicable laws and regulations. The Forest Plan describes in detail Forest-wide management direction, goals, objectives, research needs, desired conditions, standards, and guidelines.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan and other applicable laws and regulations. The Selected Alternative will meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and will contribute toward reaching Forest Plan goals and objectives. The Selected Alternative is consistent with all land use designation standards and guidelines. I also find that my decision to implement the Selected Alternative is consistent with all applicable laws and regulations including National Forest Management Act (NFMA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the other laws presented in the section “Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations” in this ROD.

My decision is consistent with Forest Service policy outlined in agency directives. By providing timber for offer and supporting jobs, the Selected Alternative also contributes to the USDA Investment Strategy for Creating Jobs and Healthy Communities in Southeast Alaska.

Summary of the Rationale

In making this decision I considered how the alternatives responded to the Purpose and Need, key issues, environmental effects, public comments, Forest Plan and applicable laws, regulations, and policy.

I found that the Selected Alternative provides the best mix of beneficial resources for the public, within a framework of existing laws, regulations, policies, public needs and desires, and the capabilities of the land. None of the alternatives can provide benefits for and meet the needs of all members of the public. My decision includes the evaluation of the trade-offs between effects to resources, desired products, and social values.

The Selected Alternative best meets the stated Purpose and Need for the project. It makes approximately 56 MMBF of timber available to the timber industry while minimizing effects to the environment.

It also best addresses the key issues as a whole by providing a supply of timber, maintaining old-growth forest habitat, preserving scenic quality, and providing and maintaining public access to the National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island.

The Selected Alternative will meet the Forest Plan direction and conforms to the National Forest Management Act. The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects from project activities are consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan. I have found that the design features and mitigation measures in Appendix 1 – Wrangell Island Project Unit Cards, and design criteria in Appendix 2 – Wrangell Island Project Road Cards, are effective in reducing environmental impacts based upon the Forest Plan analysis and experience in using these measures.

Alternatives

Alternatives Considered in Detail

The Forest Service designed five alternatives for detailed analysis as part of the Wrangell Island Project. These include the no action alternative, the proposed action, and three alternatives developed in response to key issues to provide a reasonable range of alternatives. With the exception of Alternative 1, all were designed to achieve the Purpose and Need for the Wrangell Island Project. All five alternatives are described in detail in chapter 2 of the FEIS.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1, the no action alternative, proposed no new timber harvest or road construction in the project area. It does not preclude timber harvest from other areas or from the project area in the future. This alternative represents the existing conditions and serves as a baseline for comparing the action alternatives.

Road access management would fully implement the 2007 Wrangell Ranger District Access and Travel Management Plan decision (ATM) for Wrangell Island. The ATM deferred closure of some roads until the Wrangell Island Project EIS is complete. Under Alternative 1, approximately 23.5 miles of NFS road currently open to motorized use would be closed, and 2.5 miles of existing NFS road would be decommissioned. Approximately 73.7 miles of existing NFS road would be open for public use for motorized vehicles of all types.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2, the proposed action, is the Selected Alternative. See page 7 (“Features of the Selected Alternative”) for discussion related to this alternative.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 was designed to harvest timber in Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs while maintaining scenic quality, old-growth habitat and habitat connectivity as specified in the Forest Plan. Alternative 3 is designed to address Issues 2 (Wildlife Habitat), 3 (Scenic Quality) and 4 (Access Management). Alternative 3 would yield an estimated 41 MMBF from approximately 2,648 acres. Alternative 3 would construct 15.4 miles of new NFS roads, 8.9 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 4.4 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 3 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access, by closing 16.4 miles of road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile of road. Approximately 85.4 miles of NFS road would be open for public motorized access of all types and 13.2 miles would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail).

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 was designed to harvest timber in Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs. The alternative was designed to maximize the economic value of the timber harvest from which to offer individual timber sales (Issue 1) while protecting scenic quality, old-growth habitat and connectivity. Alternative 4 would yield an estimated 43 MMBF from approximately 2,992 acres. Alternative 4 would construct 15.9 miles of new NFS roads, 10.3 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 4.0 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 4 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access, by closing 16.8 miles of road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile of road. Approximately 85.7 miles of NFS road would be open for public motorized access of all types and 12.9 miles would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail).

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 was designed to harvest timber in the Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs. The alternative emphasized Issue 2 (Wildlife Habitat) while providing timber harvest. Alternative 5 would yield an estimated volume of 39 MMBF from approximately 3,440 acres. Alternative 5 would construct 12.7 miles of new NFS roads, 6.6 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 2.9 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 5 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access. Alternative 5 would fully implement the ATM and close all newly constructed roads. Approximately 37.0 miles of road (existing and proposed) would be closed and 2.5 miles of existing road would be decommissioned. Approximately 72.9 miles of existing NFS road would be available for public use for motorized vehicles of all types and no road would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail). Comparison of Alternatives

Table 2 compares outputs and provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative for all resources.

Table 2. Alternative comparison table

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Basic Project Data					
Timber Harvest (acres)	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440
Volume of Harvest (MMBF)	0	56	41	43	39
Road construction (total miles of NFS and temporary road construction)	0	31.1	28.7	30.2	22.2
ISSUE 1: TIMBER SUPPLY AND ECONOMICS					
Timber Volume			Millions of Board Feet (MMBF)		
Sawtimber	0	51	36	38	35
Utility	0	4.9	4.6	4.8	4.4
Total Net Volume	0	55.8	40.7	43.3	39.1
Logging System			(Acres)		
Cable	0	998	969	1,010	576
Shovel	0	528	411	543	343
Helicopter	0	3,241	1,268	1,439	2,521
Total Harvest Acres	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Timber Volume by Species			Millions of Board Feet (MMBF)		
Sitka spruce	0	11.2	8.0	8.5	7.6
Hemlock	0	26.5	18.8	20.0	18.0
Western redcedar	0	4.1	2.9	3.1	2.8
Yellow-cedar	0	9.2	6.5	6.9	6.2
Financial Efficiency Analysis			(Current Region 10 Export Policy)		
Indicated Advertised Rate (\$/thousand board feet (MBF) net removed)	\$0.00	(\$59.23)	(\$55.00)	(\$61.54)	(\$92.74)
Road Construction and Reconditioning Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$81.60	\$96.80	\$98.20	\$85.40
Logging Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$325.55	\$298.66	\$303.96	\$352.30
Financial Efficiency Analysis			(Domestic Processing)		
Indicated Advertised Rate (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	(\$220.64)	(\$216.41)	(\$222.95)	(\$254.15)
Road Construction and Reconditioning Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$81.60	\$96.80	\$98.20	\$85.40
Logging Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$325.55	\$298.66	\$303.96	\$352.30
Employment			Number of Annualized Jobs Supported		
Total Jobs Estimated under Current Region 10 Policy (includes export and domestic processing)	0	222	158	168	151
100% Domestic Processing	0	267	190	202	182

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
ISSUE 2: WILDLIFE HABITAT					
Cumulative Change to Deer Habitat on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change From Historical Acres		
Historical Deep Snow Winter Habitat (high-productivity old growth (POG) ≤800' elevation on south-facing aspects)	-33%	-34%	-34%	-34%	-33%
Historical Average Winter Habitat (POG ≤1,500' elevation)	-18%	-25%	-22	-22%	-23%
Historical Non-winter Habitat (all habitats except older young growth)	-4%	-5%	-5%	-5%	-5%
Cumulative Change in Deer Model Habitat Capability (DHC) on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change in DHC Since 1954 (at stem exclusion)		
1954 Theoretical Number of Deer	-17%	-22%	-20%	-21%	-21%
Effects on Wolves on All Land Ownerships			Deer Density Compared to Historical Deer Density (deer/mi² at stem exclusion)		
Deer Model Deer Density – 1954	10.6	10.0	10.3	10.2	10.2
Road Density below 1,200' for all roads (open and closed)			Road Density (mi/mi²)		
Road Density	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2
Cumulative Change to Bear Habitat on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change From Historical Habitat		
Historical POG within 500' of Class I fish streams	-17%	-19%	-18%	-18%	-18%

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Cumulative Change to American Marten Habitat on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change From Historical Habitat		
Historical Winter Habitat – High-volume POG < 1500' in elevation	-34%	-40%	-38%	-38%	-39%
Historical Year-round Habitat – POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%
Cumulative Change to Goshawk Habitat on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change From Historical Habitat		
Historical Nesting Habitat by WAA – High-Volume POG	-32%	-39%	-36%	-36%	-37%
Historical Foraging Habitat by WAA – All POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%
Cumulative Changes to High-Volume POG and all POG Habitat on All Land Ownerships			Percent Change From Historical Habitat		
High-volume POG	-32%	-39%	-36%	-36%	-37%
All POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%
ISSUE 3: SCENIC QUALITY					
Scenic integrity objectives met?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Relative impact on scenery as a result of proposed timber harvest (lowest=1 to highest=5)	1	5	4	3	2
Relative impact on scenery as a result of proposed road construction (lowest=1 to highest=5)	1	4	3	5	2
ISSUE 4: ACCESS MANAGEMENT					
Proposed NFS road construction (miles)	0	16.8	15.4	15.9	12.7
Proposed temporary road construction (miles)	0	9.9	8.9	10.3	6.6
Proposed road reconditioning (miles)	0	4.4	4.4	4.0	2.9
Estimated total road costs (in millions of dollars)	\$0	\$4.5	\$3.9	\$4.2	\$3.3

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Road designations, following implementation (total, island-wide)					
Open to all vehicles (miles)	73.7	86.0	85.4	85.7	72.9
Motorized trails (miles)	0	14.5	13.2	12.9	0
Closed to all vehicles (miles)	23.5	15.9	16.4	16.8	37.0
Decommissioned (miles)	2.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	2.5
AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE					
Contribute to the effects of or current rate of climate change, including carbon sequestration?	not likely	slight increase	slight increase	slight increase	slight increase
Contribute to Yellow-cedar decline?	not likely	not likely	not likely	not likely	not likely
Contribute to greenhouse gas emissions?	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
AQUATICS					
NFS road stream crossings					
Class I	0	2	2	1	1
Class II	0	8	5	6	3
Class III	0	29	25	21	21
Temporary road stream crossings					
Class I	0	0	0	0	0
Class II	0	2	1	1	1
Class III	0	11	7	4	8
CULTURAL RESOURCES					
Impacts to cultural resources?	no	no	no	no	no
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE					
Disproportionately high or adverse impact on low-income or minority populations who use the project area?	no	no	no	no	no
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS					
Impact on inventoried roadless areas?	no	no	no	no	no

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
PLANTS: SENSITIVE AND RARE					
Sensitive plants: lung lichen and Henderson's checkermallow	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact
Sensitive plants: Alaska rein orchid, Calder's lovage, edible thistle, mountain lady's slipper	No risk of adverse impact	Minor risk of adverse impact	Minor risk of adverse impact	Minor risk of adverse impact	Minor risk of adverse impact
Sensitive Plant: lesser round-leaved orchid	No risk of adverse impact	Minor to moderate risk of adverse impact	Minor to moderate risk of adverse impact	Minor to moderate risk of adverse impact	Minor to moderate risk of adverse impact
PLANTS: INVASIVE					
Risk of introduction and spread of invasive species	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low
RECREATION					
Relative ranking of impacts to inventoried recreation sites on Wrangell Island, not including roads (1 = least impact, 5 = most impact)	1	5	3	4	2
SILVICULTURE					
Silvicultural system and harvest method					
Even-aged management - clearcut					
Cable/Shovel	0	1,340	1,269	1,352	737
Clearcut with reserves					
Cable/Shovel	0	68	68	68	68
Helicopter	0	0	0	0	0
Uneven-aged management – single-tree selection (up to 33% removal)					
Shovel	0	118	43	133	114
Helicopter	0	3,241	1,268	1,439	2,521
Total Acres Harvested	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440
SOILS					
Estimated acres of detrimental soil disturbance					
Yarding	0	70	65	75	45
Temporary Roads	0	54	48	56	36
Landings	0	19	17	18	13
Rockpit	0	27	24	26	19
Total acres	0	170	154	175	113

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Estimated harvest acres and road miles on steep slopes					
Acres of harvest proposed on slopes > 72% (all harvest methods)	0	199	132	153	177
Miles of proposed road on slopes > 67%	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3
WETLANDS					
Acres of wetlands impacted by activity					
Harvest (acres)	0	1,554	871	927	1,082
Rock quarry (acres)	0	11	10	11	8
Road construction (acres)	0	55	50	56	39

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Ten alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis throughout the planning process. These are presented in the FEIS chapter 2, under “Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study”.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality defines the environmentally preferred alternative as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's Section 101”. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources. 40 CFR 1505.2(b) requires that one or more environmentally preferable alternatives be disclosed. The environmentally preferable alternative is not necessarily the alternative that will be implemented, and it does not have to meet the underlying need for the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical, cultural, and natural resources.

I have reviewed the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of each alternative.

I have determined that Alternative 1, the no-action alternative, is the environmentally preferable alternative. This alternative is environmentally preferable because it would result in no environmental effects and thereby best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources on the National Forest. Alternative 1 does not meet the purpose and need, but it does provide me with a baseline to measure the direct and indirect effects of the action alternatives.

Of the action alternatives, I have identified Alternative 5 as the environmentally preferred alternative because it describes the fewest acres of timber harvest, requires the fewest miles of road construction, and as a result, would cause the fewest environmental impacts.

Public Involvement

The Wrangell Island Project included an extensive public involvement process, as documented in the FEIS chapter 1 and in the project record. I want to thank the individuals, organizations and agencies that participated and provided comments that helped to shape this analysis. The public and agency comments received during scoping helped me to define the key issues, which in turn helped to develop the

alternatives. Public comments on the draft EIS were addressed in the final EIS and responses to those comments are presented FEIS appendix B.

Mitigation

My decision includes the project design criteria and measures to minimize adverse environmental effects of the Selected Alternative as described in the unit and road cards, located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). I am satisfied that these are practicable and effective in avoiding or minimizing environmental effects. I have found them to be effective when implemented elsewhere on the Forest.

Monitoring

Monitoring is a tool which involves observing the results of management activities as a basis for evaluation. The NFMA requires national forests to monitor and evaluate their Forest Plans (36 CFR 219.12). Monitoring of the Selected Alternative will be performed during implementation and as part of the Forest Plan monitoring program as shown on the Tongass public website. Specific monitoring items are outlined in chapter 2 of the Wrangell Island Project FEIS and are included in the unit and road cards, located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage.

Project Record

The project record for this project includes the DEIS and FEIS, reports containing analyses by resource with supporting documentation, public communication and comments, all material incorporated by reference (except those documents readily available, such as the Forest Plan and Forest Service directives) and other materials produced during the environmental analysis of this project. The project record is available electronically upon request from the Wrangell Ranger District.

2016 Forest Plan

The Selected Alternative is consistent with the 2016 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2016 Forest Plan) which was signed on December 9, 2016.

The 2008 Forest Plan was developed under a prior planning regulation (1982 Planning Rule) and was amended by the 2016 Forest Plan pursuant to the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). Project consistency requirements depend upon the origin of plan direction applicable to the project. Project consistency for plan direction which was developed under the previous planning rule requires that the project be consistent only with plan standards and guidelines (chapters 3 and 4 of the 2016 Forest Plan, and FSH 1909.12, ch. 20, sec. 21.33). Project consistency requirements for plan components added or modified in conformance with the 2012 Planning Rule (chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan) are governed by 36 CFR 219.15(d).

The Wrangell Island Project includes design features intended to avoid or minimize environmental impacts and must be complied with by law, regulation, or policy. These design features include, but are not limited to BMPs, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures. The Selected Alternative is compliant with all applicable LUD-specific and forest-wide standards and guidelines in chapters 3 and 4 of the 2016 Forest Plan.

The Selected Alternative also complies with the applicable forest-wide plan components in chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan (see table 3).

Table 3. Compliance of the Selected Alternative with applicable forest-wide plan components found in chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan Amendment

Plan Component	Selected Alternative
DC-01. The Desired Condition of the Tongass National Forest is characterized by extensive, unmodified natural environments. Old-growth forests are one of the predominant vegetation types on the Tongass and connections between patches of old growth are evident.	Ninety-two percent of the old growth on the Tongass National Forest is still in an unmodified condition. The Selected Alternative will modify approximately 4,767 acres of old growth by timber harvest. Over 70 percent of National Forest old growth will remain in a natural state on Wrangell Island after the Selected Alternative is implemented. See Error! Reference source not found.
O-TIM-01. Seeking to accelerate a transition to primarily young-growth harvest, offer an average of 46 MMBF annually in a combination of old growth and young growth. When young growth offered is less than 41 MMBF, provide old growth to make up the difference and achieve the average annual projected timber sale quantity of 46 MMBF. After the transition, offer an average of 5 MMBF of old growth annually to support Southeast Alaska mills.	The Selected Alternative makes available up to 56 MMBF of old-growth timber in multiple sales, which contributes to the Tongass timber program's average annual projected timber sale quantity of 46 MMBF. No commercial young growth timber is currently available within the project area.
O-TIM-02. Seek to provide an economic timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the market demand for the planning cycle. The volume of young growth as part of the yearly offer will increase from an average of 9.2 MMBF annually in the first decade to an average of 25 MMBF annually in years 11-15 as the program nears full transition.	The Selected Alternative seeks to provide an economic timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the market demand for the planning cycle.
S-TIM-01. Not including salvage or sanitation harvest, the quantity of timber sold in a decade may not exceed the sustained yield limit of 2,480 MMBF.	The Selected Alternative contributes to the Sustained Yield Limit by providing approximately 56 MMBF of timber.
G-WILD-02. The National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007, or current) should be used when working or authorizing activities near eagle nests.	The Selected Alternative follows the latest National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines. All known bald eagle nest sites within the project area fall within the established 1,000-foot beach fringe buffer; therefore, the Forest Plan guideline for bald eagles is being met.
S-WILD-03. The intent of this standard is to use the Chapter 4 Forest Plan direction for seabird colonies to address the addition of the Aleutian tern as an Alaska Region sensitive species.	The Selected Alternative provides for the protection and maintenance of seabird (marine bird) colonies. Sensitive species such as the Aleutian tern are not found within the analysis area. Timber harvest is not planned within the beach fringe buffer; therefore, seabird colonies are protected which meets Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
S-WILD-04. Provide a minimum distance of 330 feet from human activities on the ground and waterfowl or shorebird intertidal concentration or nesting areas.	The Selected Alternative maintains a minimum 330-foot distance from waterfowl or shorebird intertidal concentrations or nesting areas. Timber harvest is not planned within the beach fringe buffer and MAFs are not located near shorebird nesting areas; therefore, the black oystercatcher is protected, and Forest Plan standards and guidelines are met.

Former Management Indicator Species: The Wrangell Island Project analyzed the 13 management indicator species (MIS) from the 2008 Forest Plan, which was in effect at the time analysis was started. The 2016 Forest Plan used the 2012 Planning Rule to amend the 2008 Forest Plan. Although the 2012 Planning Rule does not require the use of MIS to analyze project effects, the 2016 Forest Plan Amendment FEIS included these same 13 species in its effects analysis under the heading of “Former Management Indicator Species” (Forest Plan FEIS, page 3-230). The Wrangell Island Project

interdisciplinary team has reviewed the new references used in the 2016 Forest Plan FEIS for applicability to the Wrangell Island project activities, and updated the effects analysis as needed. Therefore, Wrangell Island Project analysis for wildlife is consistent with the best available science used in the 2016 Forest Plan.

Suitability of Lands for Timber Production: The Selected Alternative complies with direction in appendix A of the 2016 Forest Plan. In the Development land use designations (LUDs), old-growth forest located within Phases 2 and 3 of the Tongass Timber Sale Program Adaptive Management Strategy, or within the Tongass 77 Watersheds (T77 VCUs) and The Nature Conservancy / Audubon conservation priority areas are identified as not suitable for old-growth harvest. Under the Selected Alternative, there will be no timber harvest in the T77 VCU 4790 (Thoms Lake), which is no longer suitable for old-growth harvest.

Findings Required by Law and Regulation

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980; Section 810

Subsistence Evaluation: The subsistence analysis is presented in chapter 3 of the FEIS. Based on the information in the FEIS, effects within the foreseeable future from this project alone would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction on any subsistence resources. However, cumulatively under full implementation of the Forest Plan itself including this project, may result in a significant restriction to subsistence use of deer due to the potential effects of projects on the abundance and distribution of these resources, and on competition for these resources. Because there was a finding of a significant possibility of a significant restriction to subsistence use of deer, two subsistence hearings were held in Wrangell.

Finding: In accordance with Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 810, I have made a determination for the subsistence evaluation that the direct effects of the Selected Alternative will not result in a risk of a significant restriction on the subsistence use of any resources, including deer (FEIS, chapter 3 in the “Subsistence” section). Cumulatively, since additional timber harvest may occur at some future time in the development LUDs in WAA 1903, there may be a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence use of deer in WAA 1903 in the future due to additional reductions in habitat capability. This is consistent with the Forest Plan finding that full implementation of the Plan could lead to a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence use of deer. The potential foreseeable effects, directly and cumulatively, from the Selected Alternative will not have a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence uses for other resources including bears, furbearers, marine mammals, waterfowl, salmon, other finfish, shellfish, and other foods such as berries and roots.

The evaluation determined that this project has complied with ANILCA by considering the following three considerations.

Necessary and Consistent with Sound Management of Public Lands

I have determined that the Selected Alternative is necessary and consistent with sound management of public lands. In this regard, I have evaluated this project against the National Forest Management Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the Tongass Timber Reform Act, the Wilderness Act, the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, and the Alaska State Forest Resources and Practices Act. Based on the analysis presented in the Wrangell Island Project Final EIS, the findings I have made in this ROD and the analysis for the Forest Plan, I have determined that the Selected Alternative strikes a balance between meeting the resource needs of the public and protecting the forest resources.

Amount of Public Land Necessary to Accomplish the Proposed Action

I have determined that the amount of land necessary to implement the Selected Alternative is, considering sound multiple-use management of public lands, the minimum necessary to accomplish the purpose of this project. The entire forested portion of the Tongass is used by at least one rural community for subsistence purposes for, at a minimum, deer hunting. It is not possible to avoid all of these areas in implementing resource use activities, such as timber harvesting and road construction, and attempting to reduce effects in some areas can mean increasing the effects in other areas. The Forest-wide standards and guidelines and LUD prescriptions provide for management or limit activities in many of the area's most important for subsistence uses, such as beaches and estuaries, and areas with high fish and wildlife habitat values.

Reasonable Steps to Minimize Adverse Impacts to Subsistence Uses and Resources

Subsistence use is addressed specifically in a Forest-wide standard and guideline, and subsistence resources are covered by the Forest-wide standards and guidelines for wildlife, fish, riparian areas, and biological diversity, among others. I have determined that fish and wildlife habitat productivity will be maintained at the highest level possible for the Selected Alternative, consistent with the overall multiple-use goals and improved protection of the Forest Plan.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (as amended)

I have determined that the Selected Alternative complies with the most recent information for the protection of bald eagle protection requirements in 50 CFR Part 22.

Clean Air Act of 1970 (as amended)

I have determined that emissions from the implementation of the Selected Alternative will be of short duration and are not expected to exceed State of Alaska ambient air quality standards (18 AAC 50).

Clean Water Act (1977, as amended)

I have determined that the project activities meet all applicable State of Alaska Water Quality Standards. Section 313 of the Clean Water Act and Executive Order 12088 of January 23, 1987 addresses Federal agency compliance and consistency with water pollution control mandates. Agencies must be consistent with requirements that apply to "any governmental entity" or private person.

Compliance is to be in line with "all Federal, State, interstate, and local requirements, administrative authority, and process and sanctions respecting the control and abatement of water pollution."

Clean Water Act Sections 208 and 319 address nonpoint source pollution caused by activities such as timber harvest. Soil and water conservation practices are recognized by EPA as the primary control mechanisms for nonpoint source pollution on National Forest System lands. The site-specific application of best management practices (BMPs), with a monitoring and feedback mechanism, is the approved strategy for controlling nonpoint source pollution as defined by Alaska's Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Strategy (ADEC 2007). In 1997, the State of Alaska approved the BMPs in the Forest Service's Soil and Water Conservation Handbook (USFS 2006) as consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations. The BMPs are incorporated into the Tongass Land Management Plan. My finding is based in part on the fact that annual Tongass National Forest BMP monitoring results consistently report a high success rate at applying BMPs (USFS 2005-2012).

A discharge of dredge or fill material from normal silvicultural activities such as harvesting for the production of forest products is exempt from Section 404 permitting requirements in waters of the United States, including wetlands (404(f)(1)(A)). Forest roads, as defined by US Army Corps of Engineers guidance, are exempt from Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting if they are constructed and maintained in accordance with State-approved BMPs and the 15 Federal baseline provisions to assure that flow and

circulation patterns and chemical and biological characteristics of the waters are not impaired (404(f)(1)(E)). The baseline provisions are incorporated into the Alaska Region Soil and Water Conservation Handbook under BMP 12.5. I have determined that all roads approved in this project are exempt from Section 404 permitting requirements in waters of the United States, including wetlands (404(f)(1)(A)).

The Wrangell Island Project will implement both the National BMPs and Alaska Region BMPs.

Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended)

A biological assessment for this project was prepared for the threatened and endangered fish species and humpback whale. I concur with the finding of “No effect” for the threatened and endangered fish species and “May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” for the humpback whale (Mexico DPS). The biological assessment was sent to the National Marine Fisheries Service as part of the Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act.

Federal Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988

I have determined that the activities of the Selected Alternative will not have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any significant cave (karst) resource in the Wrangell Island Project area, since these features do not exist in the project area.

National Forest Transportation System Final Administrative Policy and Final Rule

The FEIS and this ROD are prepared to be consistent with the National Forest System Transportation Final Administrative Policy and Final Rule (2001), as well as the Tongass National Forest Level Road Analysis (2003), the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212). I have determined the proposed road system in the Selected Alternative is the minimum road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands (36 CFR 212.5).

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

The Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act requires the Forest Service to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service on projects that may affect essential fish habitat (EFH). The potential effects of the project on EFH are discussed in chapter 3 of the FEIS. Chapter 3 also includes a description of the EFH in the project area, a description of the proposed activities, and a description of the measures that will protect these essential habitats. I have reviewed the potential effects of the project on EFH discussed in the FEIS chapter 3 and have determined that this project may adversely affect EFH because of the effects of timber harvest activities, road construction, and log transfer activities at the log transfer facilities but these effects will be minimized through the use of Forest Plan requirements, BMPs, and design measures.

National Marine Fisheries Service was formally consulted on the project. Information on applicable BMPs, standards and guidelines, and design measures and criteria to minimize effects to EFH are presented in appendices 1 and 2 of this draft ROD, and in chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972

Actions authorized in the Selected Alternative will not have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on marine mammals. All marine wildlife guidelines, including special prohibitions on approaching humpback whales in Alaska as defined in 50 CFR 216 will be followed during project implementation. These marine mammal viewing guidelines are administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service and enforced by the Coast Guard, and are deemed sufficient for their protection.

A biological assessment for this project was prepared for the humpback whale. I concur with the finding of “May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” for the humpback whale (Mexico DPS). The biological assessment was sent to the National Marine Fisheries Service as part of the Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act.

National Forest Management Act of 1976 (as amended)

The National Forest Management Act requires several specific determinations in the Record of Decision. These are consistency with the governing Forest Plan, a determination of clearcutting as the optimal method of harvesting, if used, and specific authorizations to create openings over 100 acres in size.

Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended)

Based on the discussion that follows, as well as that of the 2016 Forest Plan, I have determined that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as amended.

Clearcutting as the Optimal Method of Harvesting

Based on the information presented in the FEIS and Forest Plan direction, I have determined that clearcutting is the optimal method of harvesting where it is applied. Site-specific information and rationale where clearcutting is optimal is presented in the silvicultural prescriptions. Clearcutting (an even-aged method) has been prescribed in this project to preclude or minimize the occurrence of potentially adverse impacts from windthrow where the potential is moderate to high, to remove or reduce mistletoe infestations, and to reduce wounding due to logging damage to adjacent trees.

Harvest Openings Over 100 Acres in Size

I have determined that there will be no created openings in excess of 100 acres with the harvest of the Selected Alternative units.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (as amended)

The NHPA requires the agency to consider the effects of its actions on historic properties that are eligible or listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer, Indian tribes, and interested stakeholders.

Under the provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, I have made a finding of “No Historic Properties Affected”, with a concurrence of opinion by the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer. There will be no effects to known sites listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Cultural resource surveys were conducted in the analysis area in accordance with the inventory strategy procedures in the Third Programmatic Agreement between the Forest Service, Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The State Historic Preservation Officer was consulted, following Standard procedures, in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, Subpart B for the evaluation of National Register eligibility and for assessment of effects on historic properties.

Local Indian tribes have been contacted during this process, and government-to-government consultations have been completed for the purposes of fulfilling Section 106 obligations.

While no known historic properties will be affected, unanticipated discoveries of cultural resources requires immediate cessation of activities nearby, protection of the site, and notification of the State Historic Preservation Officer as soon as practicable but not later than 48 hours in accordance with 36 CFR 800.13. In the case of the inadvertent discovery of human remains, the State of Alaska and local Indian tribes are immediately notified in accordance with State laws, and the Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA).

Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA) of 1990

I have determined this project is in compliance of the relevant provisions of TTRA. Any timber harvested under the Selected Alternative will provide part of the timber supply to the Tongass National Forest's timber program as stated in Section 101 of TTRA "... the Secretary shall, to the extent consistent with providing for the multiple use and sustained yield of all renewable forest resources, seek to provide a supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest which (1) meets the annual market demand for timber from such forest and (2) meets the annual market demand from such forest for each planning cycle."

No commercial timber harvest will occur within 100 feet of any Class I stream or any Class II stream flowing directly into a Class I stream, as required in Section 103 of the TTRA.

Applicable Executive Orders

Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains)

Per Executive Order 11988, I have determined that the Selected Alternative avoids occupation and alteration of floodplains.

Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands)

I have determined that the long- and short-term adverse effects associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands in the implementation of the Wrangell Island Project will be avoided to the extent possible. The techniques and practices required by the Forest Service serve to maintain the wetland attributes, including values and functions. In some areas, soil moisture regime and vegetation composition or structure may be altered; however, these altered acres would still be classified as wetlands and would function as wetlands in the ecosystem.

Where wetlands cannot be avoided, road construction will adhere to BMPs, which include at a minimum the Federal baseline provisions in 33 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 323 and State-approved BMPs. There will be approximately 92 acres of wetland that will no longer function as wetland due to road construction in the Selected Alternative.

Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)

The FEIS analyzed environmental justice to determine whether a disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impact on minority populations, low-income populations, or Indian tribes was likely to result from the proposed action and any alternatives. The Executive Order specifically directs agencies to consider patterns of subsistence hunting and fishing when an agency action may affect fish or wildlife. I have determined that no communities are identified as being adversely affected in this area and that none of the alternatives would have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on the health of the environment of the minority, low-income, or Indian populations that use the Wrangell Island Project area.

Executive Order 12962 (Aquatic Systems, Recreational Fisheries)

Per Executive Order 12962, I have determined that the Selected Alternative minimizes the effects on aquatic systems through project design, application of standards and guidelines, BMPs, and site-specific mitigation measures. In the Wrangell Island Project area, opportunities for recreational fishing are limited. For the Selected Alternative, recreational fishing opportunities would remain essentially the same as the current condition, because aquatic habitats are protected through implementation of BMPs and riparian standards and guidelines.

Executive Order 13007 (Indian Sacred Sites)

Executive Order 13007 directs Federal agencies to consider the protection of American Indian sacred sites and allow access where feasible. In a government-to-government relationship, the tribal government is responsible for notifying the agency of the existence of a sacred site. A sacred site is defined as a site that has sacred significance due to established religious beliefs or ceremonial uses, and which has a specific, discrete, and delineated location that has been identified by the tribe. I have determined that tribal governments or their authorized representatives were consulted and they did not identify any specific sacred site locations in the project area.

Executive Order 13112 (Invasive Species)

A risk assessment completed for the FEIS evaluated the status of invasive species in the project area and the effects from the proposed activities on them. The specific measures to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive plant species in the Selected Alternative are provided in Appendix 1 – Wrangell island Project Unit Cards.

Executive Order 13175 (Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments)

Executive Order 13175 directs Federal agencies to respect tribal self-government, sovereignty, and tribal rights, and to engage in regular and meaningful government-to-government consultation with tribes on proposed actions with tribal implications. I have complied with this Order and have consulted with and provided information to the Wrangell Cooperative Association, a federally recognized tribal government about this project.

This consultation is documented in chapter 1 of the FEIS and in the public involvement records.

Executive Order 13186 Migratory Birds

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (amended in 1936 and 1972) prohibits the taking of migratory birds, unless authorized by the Secretary of Interior. The law provides the primary mechanism to regulate waterfowl hunting seasons and bag limits, but its scope is not just limited to waterfowl. The migratory species that may stay in the area utilize most, if not all, of the habitats described in the analysis for breeding, nesting, and raising their young. The effects on these habitats were analyzed for this project. I have determined that the decision will not have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any migratory bird species in the project area. There may be moderate direct effects on individuals or small groups and their nests from the harvest of timber or the disturbance caused by harvest and related activities.

Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation)

Executive Order 13443 directs Federal agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. The analysis considered and disclosed the effects on hunting activities. I have determined that the Selected Alternative will maintain hunting opportunities by adhering to the Forest Plan standards and guidelines that maintain habitat for hunted species.

Federal and State Permits

Federal and State permits necessary to implement the authorized activities are listed at the end of chapter 1 in the FEIS.

Implementation

The timber from the Wrangell Island project will be offered in a variety of sale sizes to meet the needs of both large and small timber operators. Market conditions will be considered when offering sales. The City and Borough of Wrangell and other interested stakeholders will be consulted during the implementation design phase.

Appendices 1 and 2 contain the Selected Alternative unit cards and road cards, respectively, which are located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). These cards are an integral part of this decision because they document the specific resource concerns, management objectives, and mitigation measures to govern the layout of the harvest units and construction of roads. These cards will be used during the implementation process to ensure that the project is implemented within applicable standards and guidelines and that resource effects will not be greater than those described in the FEIS. Similar cards will document any changes to the planned layout, which may occur during implementation.

Minor changes are expected during implementation to better meet on-site resource management and protection objectives. Minor adjustments to unit boundaries are also likely during final layout to improve logging system efficiency. This usually entails adjusting the boundary to coincide with logical logging setting boundaries. Proposed changes to the authorized project actions will be subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act the National Forest Management Act, and other laws concerning such changes.

This project will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2430 and Forest Service Handbook FSH 2409.18 direction for timber sale project implementation. This direction provides a bridge between project planning and implementation and will ensure execution of the actions, environmental standards, and mitigations approved by this decision, and compliance with the Forest Plan and all applicable laws, policy and direction. The current applicable BMPs will be applied to the Selected Alternative.

Changes made during implementation will be reviewed, documented, and approved by the Responsible Official through the Tongass Supplement to FSH 1909.15-2009-1. In determining whether and what kind of NEPA action is required for changes during implementation, the Forest Supervisor will consider the criteria in the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR 1502.9(c)), and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, sec. 18 to determine whether to supplement or revise an existing environmental impact statement. I will determine whether the proposed change is a substantial change to the Selected Alternative as planned and already approved, and whether the change is relevant to environmental concerns. I will consider connected or interrelated changes to particular areas or specific activities in making this determination. The cumulative impacts of these changes will also be considered.

The implementation unit and road cards, as approved by this process, are incorporated into the timber sale contract. The sale administrators and road inspectors then enforce the contract requirements with the operators.

The implementation record for this project will display the following:

- Each harvest unit, transportation facility, and other project components as actually implemented,
- Any proposed changes to the design, location, standards and guidelines, or other mitigation measures for the project, and
- Authorization of the proposed changes.

Administrative Review - Opportunity to Object

This decision is subject to the project-level pre-decisional administrative review process pursuant to Title 36 CFR Part 218, subparts A and B. Individuals or organizations who submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project either during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with 36 CFR 218.5(a) may file objections to this draft decision. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted, timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after previous designated opportunities.

Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual; objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. If an objection is submitted on behalf of a number of individuals or organizations, each individual or organization listed must meet the eligibility requirement of having previously submitted comments on the project (36 CFR 218.7). Names and addresses of objectors will become part of the public record.

Incorporation of documents by reference in the objection is permitted only as provided for at 36 CFR 218.8(b).

The objection must be in writing and meet the objection content requirements at 36 CFR 218.8(d).

The objection must be filed with the Reviewing Officer:

Beth Pendleton, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region
709 W. 9th Street
P.O. Box 21628
Juneau, AK 99802-1628
Email address: objections-alaska-regional-office@fs.fed.us
Fax: (907) 586-7840
Phone: (907) 586-8863

Written objections, including attachments, must be filed (US mail, fax, email, hand delivery, or express delivery) with the Reviewing Officer at the correct location within 45 calendar days of the date that the legal notification of opportunity to object to this draft decision is published in the *Ketchikan Daily News*, the official newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection.

Those wishing to submit objections to this draft decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection. A copy of the legal notice will also be posted on the Forest Service project website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>.

Hand-delivered written objections will be accepted at the Regional Office during normal business hours (8:00 am through 4:30 pm) Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an email message, portable document format (.pdf), plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or MSWord (.doc or .docx). It is the responsibility of objectors to ensure their objection is received in a timely manner (36 CFR 218.9). All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

If objections are received, there is a 45-day objection review period in which the Responsible Official, the Reviewing Officer, and the objectors may meet to attempt to resolve issues. At the end of the 45 days, the Reviewing Officer will issue a written response detailing how the objections have been addressed, which may also include instructions to the Responsible Official (36 CFR 218.11(b)).

Implementation Date

A final decision on projects subject to the objection process may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the objection filing period, if no objections are received (36 CFR 218.12(c)(2)).

If objections are received, the final decision will not be signed until all concerns and instructions identified by the Reviewing Officer in the objection response have been addressed by the Responsible Official (36 CFR 218.12(b)).

Implementation of decisions subject to the objection process may commence immediately after a final decision is signed. There is not a requirement to publish notification of the decision.

Contact Information

For additional information concerning this draft decision, contact Robert Dalrymple, District Ranger, Wrangell Ranger District, P.O. Box 51, Wrangell, AK 99929, or call (907) 874-2323.

Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for the Wrangell Island Project is M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor of the Tongass National Forest.

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