

## Appendix K - Public Comments and Forest Service Responses

### Introduction

The Chugach National Forest received over 33,000 responses on the DEIS and the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. Through a content analysis process, these responses produced 37,250 substantive comments that were consolidated into 204 comments (FEIS, Chapter 6). These comments and the Forest Service responses to these comments are arranged following the DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan format. When the comments could apply to both documents, they are discussed under the DEIS. Copies of letters from government agencies, elected officials, and Native tribes are found at the end of this appendix.

### Draft Environmental Impact Statement Comments

#### Planning Process

**Comment 01:** The planning process is flawed because of the declared intent to maintain the “wild charter” of the Forest.

**Response:** Maintaining the wild character of the Chugach National Forest was identified as one of the Regional Forester’s initial draft decision criteria. These criteria were used to rank alternatives to facilitate and expedite the decision making process in choosing the Forest Service preferred alternative (36 CFR 319.129(c)). The decision criteria did not limit the range of alternatives. The planning process analyzed eight alternatives in detail that included a wide range of management approaches. The potential effects of those alternatives are shown in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. The draft decision criteria were shared early in the revision process to allow for public review and facilitate comments. The Regional Forester approved the final decision criteria in July 2001.

**Comment 02:** By law, the DEIS must include information on the “desired future condition” and must identify good and services expected from the Forest during the planning cycle.

**Response:** These are Forest Plan requirements. Each management area in the Revised Forest Plan describes desired future conditions for ecological systems and social systems. A landscaped description of Desired Future Condition has also been added to the Revised Forest Plan. Goods and services expected from the Forest during the planning period are found in Table 2-11 in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. This table displays the projected outputs for key activities under a full implementation budget. A table

showing projected outputs has been added to the Revised Forest Plan.

**Comment 03:** The DEIS analysis and conclusions are not supported by scientific data.

**Response:** The role of science in alternative development and effects analysis is discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 2. The DEIS referenced over 200 scientific publications that were used in preparing the documents; the FEIS lists over 300 (FEIS, References). In addition, the DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan had scientific consistency peer evaluations on recreation/tourism, social/economic, Kenai forest vegetation, wildlife species of concern, fish and wildlife habitat, ecological systems, and minerals. The FEIS was updated to respond to these evaluations.

**Comment 04:** The DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan did not utilize complementary land use prescriptions for National Forest lands that are adjacent to other ownerships, especially other federal agencies. The importance of these lands to ecosystem management, especially the conservation of large carnivores, should be addressed.

**Response:** Planning regulations require the Forest Service to consider the objectives of other federal, state, and local governments, and Indian tribes, as expressed in their plans and policies (36 CFR 219.7). While the Forest has strived to ensure the management prescriptions do not adversely affect adjacent land, national forest management is inherently different than the management of a National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, or tribal lands. Many times National Forest System lands provide opportunities for activities and uses that are not available on adjacent lands. For the FEIS, a regional landscape analysis was completed and was included in Chapter 3, Biodiversity, Environmental Consequences, Ecoregions of the Chugach National Forest. Additional information has also been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Potential Conflicts with Goals and Objectives of Other Land Management Agencies and Land Owners. Additional information on large carnivores has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife.

One of the five Basic Principles of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan was the coordination of any proposed management actions with the appropriate local, state or tribal governments, as well as other federal agencies (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction). This has been done throughout the planning process, including meetings to discuss the revised Preferred Alternative. Additional information on the consultation process has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 1.

**Comment 05:** The cumulative effects analysis was not sufficient. The FEIS should further evaluate and address the cumulative, direct, and secondary impacts to the lower elevation lands of the Kenai Peninsula.

**Response:** Additional information on the potential cumulative effects both at the landscape scale (FEIS, Chapter 3, Biodiversity, Environmental Consequences, Ecoregions of the Chugach National Forest) and the Forest scale (throughout Chapter 3) has been included in the FEIS. Project specific analysis for activities proposed to implement the Revised Forest Plan will also address cumulative effects. Specific impacts to the Kenai Peninsula geographic area were analyzed for each resource area where applicable. Additional information on these potential effects has been added throughout Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

**Comment 06:** The key indicators, especially for recreation, were not responsive to the issues.

**Response:** Some changes were made in the key indicators that help quantify the significant differences between the alternatives. Key indicators had to be readily available from existing data or reasonably obtained from new data. To respond to user group conflicts, a comparison of strategies used by alternative was discussed for each geographic area (Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, Copper River Delta). Areas available for winter/summer motorized recreation and areas available for winter/summer nonmotorized recreation are displayed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Access Management.

**Comment 07:** The Forest Plan is not the best tool for resolving motorized/nonmotorized conflicts. Each Ranger District should prepare a winter and summer recreation plan.

**Response:** Motorized/nonmotorized conflicts were one of the significant issues that were the focus of Forest Plan revision (FEIS, Chapter 1, Situation Statements). We have determined that it is appropriate and essential to resolve this conflict in the Forest Plan. Specialists from each District were involved in the Forest Plan revision process and public meetings were held in each ranger district community. Part of the focus of those meetings was to identify motorized/nonmotorized conflicts.

In the EIS, motorized/nonmotorized use restrictions were developed on a management prescription basis. In the Revised Forest Plan, they were developed on a polygon basis in response to public comment and to provide more flexibility. A map showing summer motorized/nonmotorized recreation access and a map showing winter motorized/nonmotorized recreation access is included in the Revised Forest Plan.

The site-specific analysis for access management is found throughout the FEIS, Chapter 3. Information of these effects has been expanded in the FEIS. The FEIS, Appendix B displays how each road, trail and route would be managed under the various alternatives. The way roads, trails, and routes are to be managed is also displayed in the Revised Forest Plan, Appendix B. After the Record of Decision is signed, roads, trails, and routes management will be implemented by a Forest Order.

**Comment 08:** Clarify how the Revised Plan will conform to the recently revised planning rule.

**Response:** The Chugach National Forest Plan revision falls under the 1982 planning regulations (36 CFR 219, September 30, 1982). However, many of the concepts included in the recently revised planning rule were used in the revision process. For example, the revised planning rule emphasized collaborative planning which was used with communities, state and local governments and Alaska Natives to develop goals and alternative ways to manage the Forest.

Another focus of the revised rule is to have scientific review of the DEIS/Forest Plan. Scientific consistency evaluations were completed on recreation/tourism, social/economic, Kenai forest vegetation, wildlife species of concern, fish and wildlife habitat, ecological systems management, and minerals. There were also expert discussions on total economic value, the wildlife conservation strategy and the potential risk to subsistence resources.

The new planning rule was suspended by the Department of Agriculture in early May 2001. All Forests were instructed to use the 1982 Planning Rule until the new rule is revised.

**Comment 09:** A legal review of the Forest Plan and EIS is needed.

**Response:** Forest planning is done under a host of federal laws and regulations (see Revised Forest Plan, Appendix D). Personnel in the Regional Office have extensively reviewed the processes used and the documents produced during the planning process. The General Accounting Office has also conducted a review of the planning process on the Chugach National Forest (August 2001).

**Comment 10:** Several Native corporations and/or entities were concerned about their tribal rights.

**Response:** Throughout the Forest planning process the rights of Native tribes and people have been identified and the laws and regulations protecting these rights have been incorporated into all management area prescriptions and the standards and guidelines (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction). We know

of no Revised Forest Plan action or requirement that would affect tribal rights.

## **Chapter 2 - The Alternatives**

**Comment 01:** The Preferred Alternative should be modified or a different alternative should be selected.

**Response:** Based on public comment and ID Team review, the Preferred Alternative described in the DEIS has been modified in the final documents. Changes between the DEIS Preferred Alternative and the FEIS Preferred Alternative are described in the FEIS, Preface, Summary of Changes. The biggest change included creating a new wilderness-like prescription for the Copper River Delta-east area (135 501(b) - 1). There were few changes in outputs or effects. Where needed, the environmental effects analysis in Chapter 3 has been updated to reflect the modified Preferred Alternative. The reasons for selecting the Preferred Alternative are disclosed in the Record of Decision that accompanies the FEIS.

**Comment 02:** The Preferred Alternative ignores congressional language in Section 501(b) of ANILCA by assigning prescriptions in the Copper River area that are much more restrictive than those established by Congress. ANILCA states what can and cannot be done; keep these lands open as stated. Wilderness studies and recommendations violate the “no-more” clause of ANILCA.

**Response:** ANILCA Section 708 states that further review of the Wilderness potential for inventoried roadless areas in Alaska should be done through forest planning. Given the specific congressional direction for 501(b) areas, it is clear that these areas are subject to multiple use-sustained yield management through the land management planning process. However, section 501(b) of ANILCA requires that the conservation of fish and wildlife resources be given primacy in determining the management direction. To comply with this requirement, it was Forest planning direction that if a 501(b) area were considered for Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designation, the primacy of the conservation of fish and wildlife resources will be included in the prescription (Forest Supervisor’s Chugach National Forest Memo, 1920-2, Planning Direction for the ANILCA 501(b) areas of the Forest, August 5, 1999) (see Revised Forest Plan, Appendix D).

ANILCA Section 1326(b) states, “No further studies of Federal lands in the State of Alaska for the single purpose of considering the establishment of a Conservation System Unit, National Recreation Area, or for related or similar purposes shall be conducted unless authorized by this Act or by further Act of Congress.” The “no more” clause in ANILCA refers to single use

studies; not forest planning that is required by the NFMA. The court recently upheld this interpretation of ANILCA (U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska 2001).

**Comment 03:** The DEIS did not contain a reasonable range of alternatives, as all alternatives contain various amounts of preservation. The Primitive and the Proposed Research Natural Area prescriptions were under-represented in all alternatives.

**Response:** Thirty comprehensive alternatives were developed early in the planning process (FEIS, Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered in Detail and Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detail Study). The Forest Supervisor directed the ID Team to review all 30 alternatives and to recommend a manageable number that addressed the range of situations identified for the Revised Forest Plan. Eight alternatives were studied in detail, including the No Action Alternative (1984 Forest Plan). The eight DEIS alternatives have 0, 17, 26, 30, 34 (Preferred), 48, 69 and 81 percent of the land in preservation prescriptions (FEIS, Chapter 2, Alternative Descriptions). With 99 percent of the Forest in roadless lands that are eligible for Wilderness classification, we have determined that this is a reasonable range.

The eight DEIS alternatives proposed from 2,500 to 71,100 acres in the RNA prescription and from 0 to 91,580 acres in the Primitive prescription. When you consider this with other preservation management, we believe that the range is also reasonable.

### **Chapter 3 – Environment and Effects**

**Comment 01:** The separation of Chapter 3 into two chapters (the standard EIS outline) would help organize the information into a more reader-friendly format. The rationale for decisions resulting in resource tradeoffs should be more fully documented in the FEIS.

**Response:** We took a very close look before combining Chapters 3 and 4. The decision to combine Chapters 3 and 4 was done to make the document more reader-friendly. Experience by others who have used this format was very positive. Combining the chapters eliminates the need to continually flip from one chapter to the next while looking at similar information. In keeping with NEPA requirements, the rationale for our decisions can be found in the Record of Decision, which accompanies this FEIS.

### **Physical Elements**

**Comment 01:** The DEIS did not contain an analysis of the effects of noise. A separate section should be added to the Physical Element section.

**Response:** The effects of noise are discussed throughout the EIS in the appropriate section. For example, noise is discussed in Chapter 3, Wildlife, Environmental Consequences and in

Recreation and Tourism, same section. Noise is also discussed in Appendix C, Section B. Capability of Management as Wilderness or in an Unroaded Condition, (3) Opportunity for Solitude. We believe this is an appropriate way to handle the effects of noise. Additional information on the effects of noise is included in the FEIS (Chapter 3, Wildlife and Recreation and Tourism).

### Air

**Comment 01:** The DEIS failed to analyze air pollution resulting from motorized recreation. Concentrated snowmachine use in areas such as Turnagain Pass and Twentymile-Placer has already degraded air quality. An additional air quality problem is tour ships and other boats that degrade the visual quality in Prince William Sound.

**Response:** The DEIS did address the potential for negative effects of snowmobile use and marine traffic on air quality, though not in a quantitative analysis. Additional information has been added to the FEIS on popular snowmobile areas on the Chugach National Forest and the potential of snowmobile use to impact air quality within and adjacent to these areas (FEIS, Chapter 3, Air, Environmental Consequences).

### Water/Riparian/Wetlands

**Comment 01:** Wetlands must be protected. The DEIS omits mention of a significant source of water pollution; fuel spills in areas heavily used by motorized recreation.

**Response:** Wetlands are protected through Forestwide standards and guidelines for Fish, Water and Riparian Areas (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction). The DEIS did address the potential for negative effects of snowmobile use and marine traffic on water quality, though not in a quantitative analysis of the potential for spilled or unburned fuels to impact water quality and riparian dependent resources (FEIS, Chapter 3, Water/Riparian/Wetlands, Environmental Consequences).

**Comment 02:** There are numerous statements concluding that impacts from activities would be insignificant, minimized or mitigated by applying protective measures or Best Management Practices. These conclusions are not supported by any analysis of the effectiveness of such measures. The effects analysis in the FEIS should be revised to include sufficient information to support the conclusions being reached.

**Response:** The effectiveness of Best Management Practices and Fish and Water standards and guidelines are discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Soil, Water/Riparian Wetlands, and Aquatic Ecosystems. Best Management Practices and Aquatic standards and guidelines have been validated through peer review. Best Management Practices are evaluated for their effectiveness every

year on selected projects (timber sales roads, etc.) through monitoring. Results of this monitoring are published in the yearly Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report. Where adequate information is not available to determine the relative effectiveness of the Best Management Practices, the uncertainty of the impacts are discussed (such as, the effectiveness of standards and guidelines on the viability of certain aquatic species).

**Comment 03:** The FEIS should explain the conclusion that past management activities have not adversely affected groundwater and disclose the type and level of analysis conducted to date.

**Response:** Additional information on contaminated groundwater has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Minerals, Cumulative Effects.

### **Biodiversity**

**Comment 01:** The Chugach National Forest should be managed for biodiversity. The FEIS should place more emphasis on the 1992 Ecological System management policy.

**Response:** We agree that the Forest should be managed for biodiversity. The Preferred Alternative emphasizes natural processes across most of the Forest, with active management in selected locations to improve ecological systems and fish and wildlife habitat. Biodiversity is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3, Biodiversity. Additional information on Biodiversity has been added to the FEIS.

**Comment 02:** The FEIS should place more emphasis on that portion of the Chugach National Forest within the Kenai Peninsula, because from a wildlife conservation viewpoint, the Kenai Peninsula is ecologically distinct from other areas of the Forest.

**Response:** We agree. The Kenai Peninsula is ecologically distinct from other areas of the Forest. It is also more developed, more isolated, and more at risk than other areas of the Forest. Where we thought it was meaningful, information in the EIS was discussed and displayed for three distinct geographic areas of the Forest: the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta. In addition, the FEIS, Table 3-15 shows the changes in forest cover types on the Chugach National Forest portion of the Kenai Peninsula from 1974 to 1999. Table 3-16 in the FEIS displays the changes in forest size class distribution on the Chugach National Forest portion of the Kenai Peninsula from 1974 to 1999. Additional information on the Kenai Peninsula has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Biodiversity, Wildlife, and Recreation and Tourism, Environmental Consequences.

**Aquatic Ecosystems and Essential Fish Habitat**

**Comment 01:** The cutthroat trout is questionable as a management indicator species (MIS) because it is on the far edge of its historic habitat.

**Response:** We know that the cutthroat trout is on the far edge of its historic habitat and have carefully reviewed its usefulness as a MIS. The western extension of the coastal cutthroat trout occurs on the west side of Prince William Sound. Recent studies of cutthroat trout have indicated large variations in genotypes occur in the populations along the fringes of the Gulf of Alaska. Studies of harvest rates of cutthroat indicate that they are vulnerable to over-harvest. The risk of unrestricted permitting of outfitter/guides and increased angling pressure within Prince William Sound may create a situation where small isolated populations would be at potential risk. Therefore, we have change the cutthroat trout from a MIS to a species of special interest (SSI).

**Comment 02:** Were chemical analysis conducted on ponds that were created by past gravel operations before they were enhanced for fish? How successful were such activities? Definable, measurable standards and guidelines and prescriptions should address such practices.

**Response:** Ponds created from gravel extraction have been characteristically analyzed for chemical parameters that are conducive to fish growth. Oxygen content has been the primary component that has been measured to determine whether the ponds would be capable of supporting fish. The areas where gravel extraction could lead to possible fish enhancement activities are variable. Because of the specific site characteristics, a detailed set of standards and guidelines are not appropriate at the Forest Plan level. These standards and guidelines would be developed at the project level as site-specific projects are proposed, and would include a monitoring plan for the project.

**Comment 03:** Buffers should be used on Class II, III, an IV streams, as well as unclassified channels, to minimize downstream water quality and aquatic habitat impacts. Lakes, regardless of their size, deserve full riparian protection to maintain water quality standards.

**Response:** The draft Alaska Region Aquatic Ecosystem Management Handbook prescribes riparian management strategies for all Class I, II, and III streams on the Chugach National Forest (USDA, Forest Service 1999b). Management objectives for aquatic ecosystems are specified for specific process groups. Prescriptions for management activities, such as road or facility construction, are developed based on the objective for each channel type process group. No commercial timber harvest is allowed within these riparian zones. Riparian protection for Class IV streams is based on the Alaska Region's Best Management

Practices (USDA, Forest Service 1996a). Buffers of a minimum of 100 feet are required on all Class I and II lakes. Depending on the level of sensitivity of the stream channel and adjacent slopes, buffer strips might be used based on individual site characteristics.

**Comment 04:** Would there be any impact to commercial fishing?

**Response:** The Forest Service manages the riparian habitat with aquatic ecosystem management standards and Best Management Practices and Forest Service activities have little impact on fish populations. Ocean currents, market prices, global supply and demand, as well as state catch limits have greater impact on commercial fisheries than Forest management. Additional information has been added to the FEIS on the potential effects on fish habitat and populations.

### **Fire Management**

**Comment 01:** The DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan revision did not address the risk of catastrophic fire. Beetle-killed trees should be harvested to reduce the possible loss of millions of dollars worth of private property that is at risk from catastrophic wildfires.

**Response:** Catastrophic fire is discussed in the EIS, Chapter 3, Fire, Cumulative Effects. Additional information has been added to this section. Any alternative, such as the Preferred, that makes it more difficult and time consuming to complete fuel treatment work, by either limiting access or by removing a direct treatment technique such as timber harvest or thinning, would hinder restoration efforts. With over 1.3 million acres of dead trees on the Kenai (all ownerships), the best defense private landowners have is to reduce fuels on their lands, create defensible space around their homes and other structures, and maintain fuel breaks along places of habitation. Under all alternatives, the Forest program is to treat 400 acres a year, all on the Kenai Peninsula, using prescribed fire. Most of this work is adjacent to high value public lands. Similar work is being done on other high-risk fire areas on Kenai Peninsula Borough, state and private lands. Please also see our response to the next comment.

### **Insects and Diseases**

**Comment 01:** The DEIS failed to adequately address the situation created by the spruce beetle epidemic within the Forest. The Forest Service should adopt more comprehensive provisions for the mitigation, harvesting, and reforestation of the hundreds of thousands of acres impacted by the spruce bark beetle.

**Response:** The on-going spruce beetle infestation within Southcentral Alaska has impacted millions of spruce trees on hundreds of thousands of forested acres on the Kenai Peninsula. The impacts occur on all land ownerships where spruce trees in the

sapling, pole or saw timber size class are present. Throughout this epidemic, the Forest Service has been working cooperatively with the Kenai Peninsula Borough, State of Alaska, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and other landowners in fire, pest, and vegetation management.

On National Forest System lands, the extent of the beetle problem has been limited to approximately one-third (69,000 acres) of the total forested acreage (217,000 acres) on the Kenai Peninsula. This acreage has experienced spruce tree mortality ranging from light to heavy since 1950 (FEIS, Table 3-30). The other two-thirds of the forested acres on the Kenai Peninsula contain mountain hemlock, paper birch, aspen, or seedling/sapling spruce trees that are not currently susceptible to spruce bark beetle attack. Cumulative vegetation treatments on National Forest System lands between 1974-1999, as displayed in the FEIS, Figure 3-26, total about 7,800 acres.

The amount of proposed vegetation management on the Chugach National Forest for the planning period varies by alternative (FEIS, Table 3-35) and is focused almost exclusively on the Kenai Peninsula under the Forest's "Five-Year Forest Restoration Plan". The grand total of all forest restoration vegetation treatments at the end of the first decade (includes reforestation) ranges from a low of 32,430 acres in Alternative F to a high of 72,590 acres in the No Action Alternative and Alternative C. The Preferred Alternative is slightly less at 71,990 acres of treatment.

### **Wildlife**

**Comment 01:** The Forest should be managed for wildlife. The analysis of the effects of management activities on wildlife needs to be strengthened. For example, there is substantial literature on deer, mountain goats, and goshawks from similar habitats in Southeastern Alaska. The cumulative effects discussion addressing wildlife was minimal. Certainly it would be valuable to summarize Suring et al. (1998), "Analysis of cumulative effects on brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula, Southcentral Alaska". The cumulative effects analysis ignored activities on adjacent private lands and failed to recognize the decline in unroaded lands on the Kenai Peninsula.

**Response:** Protecting and managing wildlife is a major consideration of the Revised Forest Plan. Forestwide standards and guidelines were developed for (1) Fish, Water and Riparian Areas, (2) General Wildlife, (3) Threatened and Endangered Species, (4) Seabird Rookeries Habitat Management, (5) Waterfowl and Shorebird Habitats Management, (6) Raptor Nest Protection Management, (7) Brown Bear Habitat Management, and (8) Mountain Goat and Dall Sheep Habitat Management (Revised

Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction). Many of these standards and guidelines have been strengthened.

The analysis of the effects on wildlife has been updated and additional discussions regarding black oystercatcher, brown bear, dusky Canada goose, moose, mountain goat, gray wolf, lynx, marbled murrelet, Montague Island hoary marmot, Sitka black-tailed deer, Kenai wolverine, river otter, Montague Island tundra vole, eagle, and swan have been added. Cumulative effects for brown bear have been addressed by including some of the summary information from Suring and others (1998) (FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife). Additional information on cumulative effects on the Kenai Peninsula was provided, throughout Chapter 3.

**Comment 02:** The Forest Service must comply with laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, that mandate an assessment of the Preferred Alternative. The Forest Service must prepare a biological assessment of effects on aquatic mammals.

**Response:** As stated in the DEIS, we have prepared a Biological Assessment regarding threatened and endangered species, including aquatic species. It is included in the FEIS as Appendix G. The assessment concluded that there would be no affect on threatened and endangered species. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this assessment.

**Comment 03:** The Preferred Alternative must permanently protect habitat of critical species, especially for those species that may be isolated (like large carnivores on the Kenai). The DEIS glossed over Kenai Peninsula brown bear concerns. There was no direct discussion of the effects of roads and increasing human access on bear conservation. The Forest Service must undertake a more comprehensive viability analysis for brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula.

**Response:** The Preferred Alternative will have little effect on wildlife habitat. The discussion regarding the risks to brown bears from roads and increasing human access has been expanded in the FEIS. The Forest Service is continuing its participation in the Interagency Brown Bear Study Team that is gathering data to analyze the population trends and population viability of brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula. To protect brown bear habitat, Forestwide standards and guidelines were developed (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction, Brown Bear Habitat Management).

**Comment 04:** The DEIS failed to acknowledge lawful trapping as a recognized activity on National Forest lands.

**Response:** Trapping is a recognized activity on National Forest System lands. It is discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife and Chapter 3, Subsistence.

**Comment 05:** The DEIS did not provide an adequate analysis of the impacts to wildlife populations from helicopter overflights and/or landings or other motorized activities.

**Response:** Additional information on the impact to wildlife from helicopters and other motorized activities has been added to FEIS. Site-specific proposals for the use of helicopters or other motorized activities will be further analyzed at the project level. To evaluate the severity of impacts of overflights at the project level, the Chugach National Forest will use the criteria found in the 1994 Report to Congress, Report on the effects of aircraft on the National Park System (FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Environmental Consequences, General Effects, Effects on wildlife from aircraft overflights).

**Comment 06:** Brown bears should be listed as a Species of Special Interest in the FEIS. Certain species are missing from the DEIS; killer whales, harbor seals, northern flying squirrels, and black bears.

**Response:** Brown bears are designated a Management Indicator Species for the purpose of this EIS. Killer whales, harbor seals, northern flying squirrels and black bears were not selected for further analysis because they were not at risk from Forest management activities (FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Analysis Process).

**Comment 07:** The Forest Service should cite the information used to determine that the population of brown bears is currently healthy and stable.

**Response:** This reference has been added to the FEIS. The actual statement cited from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Management report indicated that the authors believe the population is stable or may be slightly increasing. (ADF&G 1999c. Mary Hicks ed. Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration. Management Report, Survey Inventory Activities 1 July – 30 June 1998, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, pp 55-72.)

**Comment 08:** The section on the gray wolf (DEIS, pages 3-195 and 3-196) should acknowledge and report implications of the research, monitoring and findings on wolves on the Kenai Peninsula from 1976 to the present.

**Response:** This information has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Affected Environment, Gray Wolf.

**Comment 09:** The section on the lynx (DEIS, page 3-196) should acknowledge and report the implications of the research, monitoring and findings on lynx on the Kenai Peninsula from 1982-1995. In reference to the first sentence in the lynx section, lynx are probably not common within the Kenai Peninsula portion of the Chugach National Forest and are probably very uncommon in those forested portions of the Chugach National Forest dominated by mature spruce and hemlock forest east of Kenai Lake. Actions taken by the Forest Service in the lower 48 states should be discussed, considered, and implemented in the FEIS.

**Response:** The discussion of the lynx distribution has been updated in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Affected Environment, Lynx. The situation in the lower 48 states where lynx are protected is not analogous to lynx in Alaska on the Chugach National Forest.

**Comment 10:** The impacts of potential utility corridors along swan, crane, and waterfowl migration routes should be added, addressed and evaluated in the FEIS.

**Response:** The impacts of potential utility corridors along swan, crane, and waterfowl migration routes have been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Environmental Consequences.

**Comment 11:** Conduct a more thorough assessment of the effects on marbled murrelet populations as a result of increased recreational activities in the Prince William Sound. Establish stands that maintain large blocks of suitable habitat, maintain and enhance buffer habitat, and decrease the risks of loss due to fire and wind throw.

**Response:** The Preferred Alternative harvests few timber stands within marbled murrelet habitat. Under the Preferred Alternative, over 95 percent of the marbled murrelet habitat will be managed under natural conditions. Fire, because of its very low occurrence, is not a significant problem within their habitat. Additional information of the effect of the alternatives on the marbled murrelet has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Wildlife, Environmental Consequences, Marbled Murrelet.

**Comment 12:** The Forest should develop a habitat management strategy to maintain long-term, well-distributed goshawk populations. The FEIS should address this issue in more detail.

**Response:** We have concluded that the Forestwide guideline for Raptor Nest Protection Management, coupled with the allocation of lands under the Preferred Alternative, provide the habitat necessary to maintain long-term, well distributed habitat for the goshawk.

**Comment 13:** More research is needed to determine if the Queen Charlotte goshawk range does extend to the Prince William Sound area.

**Response:** We will continue to inventory goshawk nest sites under implementation planning. Neither genetic tracking nor research is anticipated under the Revised Forest Plan.

**Comment 14:** Dall sheep should be added to the mountain goat habitat management section.

**Response:** We agree. Mountain goat habitat is similar enough to Dall sheep habitat that the analysis for mountain goats is indicative of the effects of each alternative on Dall sheep habitat. Additionally, standards and guidelines developed for the conservation of important areas of mountain goat habitat are equally applicable to Dall sheep and have been specifically linked to sheep habitat (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction, Mountain Goat and Dall Sheep Habitat Management).

### **Heritage Resources**

**Comment 01:** The Forest Service has not provided for the protection of cultural resources by listing the location of identified sites in the documents.

**Response:** It is generally not Forest Service policy to disclose exact locations of sites that are not already in the public domain. However, one site was listed in the DEIS. This has been corrected in the FEIS. General reference to sites which are important in understanding the history of the Forest, without describing their location, is not determined to “create a risk of harm to such resources or to the site at which such resources are located” (Archaeological Resources Protection Act, USC 470aa-mm, § 470hh. (a) Disclosure of information).

### **Lands**

**Comment 01:** The DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan failed to address the significant impacts to and management of tidelands and submerged lands that are a part of the Chugach National Forest, and therefore violate the NFMA and NEPA. Aside from the issue of ownership, the Forest Service must regulate activities on the waters of Prince William Sound to protect designated uplands.

**Response:** Federal land management agencies and the State of Alaska disagree on the ownership of “coastal lands” (tide and submerged lands). The question of ownership is currently under litigation (Tongass National Forest). To promote efficient, cooperative management of the coastal lands and to provide public access, the Forest Service entered into an agreement (March, 1992) with the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources. This agreement applies to all coastal lands which, as a direct result of the 1964 earthquake, were uplifted above the line of mean high tide as it existed at the time of the earthquake, thus effectively becoming dry land. The agreement also applies to uplands which, as a direct result of the earthquake, subsided below the line of mean high tide, as it existed at the time of the earthquake, thus effectively becoming tide or submerged lands. The agreement also applies to any additions or deletions to those uplifted or subsided

coastal land occurring since the 1964 earthquake as a result of natural movement of the coastline through avulsion, accretion, reliction, erosion, submersion, or other means. This agreement provides that such lands below mean high tides will be managed by the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources; and such lands within the National Forest System above mean high tides will be managed by the Forest Service. The FEIS and Revised Forest Plan address lands above mean high tide. If the Court finds in favor of the U. S. Government, submerged lands within the boundary of the Chugach National Forest would be managed consistent with adjacent federal uplands.

The Forest Service also has a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of Alaska that coordinates the Coastal Zone Management Act/Alaska Coastal Management Program Consistency Reviews. We know of no activities on the waters of Prince William Sound that are degrading Chugach National Forest uplands.

**Comment 02:** The DEIS failed to address significant impacts to adjacent lands (Chugach State Park, Kenai National Wildlife Area, and Kenai Fjords National Park).

**Response:** Additional information on cumulative effects both at the landscape scale (FEIS, Chapter 3, Biodiversity, Environmental Consequences, Ecoregions of the Chugach National Forest) and the Forest scale (Chapter 3, Recreation and Tourism) has been included in the FEIS. The Revised Forest Plan will have few impacts on adjacent lands because most management area prescriptions are similar to adjacent lands (Chugach State Park, Kenai National Wildlife Area, and Kenai Fjords National Park). The FEIS discloses the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on adjacent lands. Forest planning is a two-step process. Individual projects are subject to additional environmental analysis and disclosure (FEIS, Chapter 3, Relationships Between Programmatic and Site Specific Effects Analysis).

### **Recreation and Tourism**

**Comment 01:** There should be more/less opportunities for motorized recreation.

**Response:** One of the significant issues identified by the public and carefully considered during the analysis was motorized and nonmotorized interests for recreation and tourism. The alternatives looked a wide array of motorized/nonmotorized opportunities (see FEIS, Chapter 3, Access Management, Table 3-68). The challenge was to allocate land uses to meet a variety of access interests. All comments were fully considered when developing the Preferred Alternative. We recognize that there is a need to provide areas on the Forest where motorized use is not allowed. Working with the public, the Preferred Alternative was crafted to minimize the impact

on existing areas used for winter, motorized activities while specifically identifying areas for nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

**Comment 02:** More work is necessary and additional options need to be explored to craft acceptable solutions at Lost Lake and the Twentymile areas. Displacement of concentrated motorized use at Lost Lake could shift to the Resurrection Trail area, which supports the Kenai Mountain caribou herd, a moderate density of moose, and a limited number of sheep and goats.

**Response:** For the Twentymile drainage, the Preferred Alternative includes a nonmotorized area adjacent to the Seward Highway with a corridor to be designated and marked by the Glacier Ranger District for snowmachine access to the backcountry. The Preferred Alternative also retains winter motorized use in the Lost Lake area.

**Comment 03:** There should be more/less opportunities for helicopter-supported activities.

**Response:** The challenge was to allocate land uses to meet a variety of access and recreation and tourism interests. All comments were fully considered when developing a full range of alternatives and identifying a Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative considered public comments and concerns, safety, and resource issues (including wildlife). The Revised Forest Plan generally describes “zoning” of the Forest, identifies allowed activities and provides standards and guidelines for allowing use. Additionally, for commercial use of helicopters (i.e. guided heliskiing and heli-hiking tours), project-specific environmental analysis must be completed upon receipt of any request to conduct such activities before a decision is made and the use authorized. Full public involvement will be an important part of any site-specific analysis.

Helicopter landing in Wilderness is prohibited by statute (The Wilderness Act of 1964, Section 3(c)) and regulation (36 CFR 261.16) except as otherwise provided in the Wilderness Act for administration of the area for purposes of the Act and as expressly provided by ANILCA for a few non-recreation activities. The Wilderness Act (Section 4(d)) provides the Chief of the Forest Service the discretion to allow the continuation of helicopter use that was established prior to designation of the area as Wilderness. The use of this discretionary authority is not proposed in this Plan.

**Comment 04:** The needs of disabled and older Americans have been neglected with 95 percent of the Forest inaccessible to these groups.

**Response:** The Chugach National Forest, by its very nature, is rugged and remote. While improving access for people of all abilities was not identified as a specific issue within the Revised

Forest Plan, we are required to include improvements to meet accessibility standards any time we build or renovate public facilities or trails. Individual project analysis will identify specific opportunities to improve accessibility at appropriate levels.

**Comment 05:** The Forest Service should prohibit or limit all jet ski or airboat use.

**Response:** The Revised Forest Plan is a management plan for upland uses. We recognize that there are several issues related to uses and activities on waters with the Forest. At this time, we are not identifying any management direction for use on water within the Forest.

**Comment 06:** The DEIS did not adequately describe and analyze the potential adverse impact of motor vehicles, especially snowmobiles or helicopters.

**Response:** Additional information has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Air, Soils, Wildlife, and Recreation and Tourism. There have been no studies on the Chugach National Forest relating to the impact of motor vehicles; however, there have been numerous studies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem area, Rocky Mountains, and Midwest relating to the impacts of snowmobiles and ATV use on wildlife, vegetation, and air and water quality (Olliff et al. 1999). Additional information on the cumulative effects of motorized recreation has been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Recreation and Tourism, Cumulative Effects.

**Comment 07:** The Forest Service should conduct studies to determine the current and projected use and the carrying capacity of the Forest. A more aggressive approach for measuring carrying capacity and establishing reasonable guidelines for ensuring that expanding use is compatible with maintaining the Forest's ecological integrity should be emphasized.

**Response:** Carrying capacity studies have not been completed on the Chugach National Forest; however, they are on going at this time. Table 3-8 in the Revised Forest Plan identifies level of encounters on trails, on shorelines and off trails/shorelines, and the maximum party size for the recreation opportunity spectrum classes. These classes will be monitored as part of Revised Forest Plan implementation.

**Comment 08:** The DEIS did not reflect the level of coordination with regard to recreation and/or tourism activities on other federal, state or private lands.

**Response:** As described in Response to Comment 04 under the Planning Process section, planning regulations require the Forest Service to consider the objectives of other federal, state, and local governments, and Indian tribes, as expressed in their plans and policies (36 CFR 219.7). While the Forest has strived to ensure that the management prescriptions do not adversely affect adjacent

land, national forest management is inherently different than a National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, or tribal lands. Many times National Forest System lands provide opportunities for activities and uses that are not available on adjacent lands. A regional landscape analysis was completed and is included in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Biodiversity, Environmental Consequences, Ecoregions of the Chugach National Forest. Additional information has also been added to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Recreation and Tourism and Potential Conflicts with Goals and Objectives of Other Land Management Agencies and Land Owners.

One of the five Basic Principles of the Revised Forest Plan was the coordination of any proposed management actions with the appropriate local, state or tribal governments, as well as other federal agencies (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forestwide Direction).

**Comment 09:** Limit ATV use to a few designated roads or trails, not road areas. Limit the spring/summer/fall use of ATVs and four-wheel drive vehicles to designated trails in a limited number of valleys.

**Response:** As described in Response to Comment 01, one of the significant issues identified by the public and carefully considered during the analysis was motorized and nonmotorized interests for recreation and tourism. The challenge was to allocate land uses to meet a variety of interests. All comments were fully considered when developing a full range of alternatives and identifying a Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative was crafted with public input to minimize any reduction in existing motorized areas while identifying locations for nonmotorized recreation. It considered preferences of users, resource capabilities, and ability to reduce conflicts through separation of different user types by time and space. The way roads, trails, and routes are to be managed under the various alternatives is displayed in the FEIS, Appendix F.

**Comment 10:** An EIS is required to analyze the effects on adjacent lands; in this case Chugach State Park and Kenai Fjords National Park, which are almost entirely closed to motorized use. The Forest Plan compounds the unavailability of reasonable opportunities for motorized recreation in Southcentral Alaska.

**Response:** The discussion on cumulative effects, including the availability of adjacent lands available for motorized recreation, has been expanded in the FEIS (Chapter 3, Recreation and Tourism). Under the Preferred Alternative, over 80 percent of Chugach National Forest lands on the Kenai Peninsula are available for motorized recreation opportunities.

**Comment 11:** The Resource Assessment for recreation and tourism was incomplete and inadequate, and therefore violates NFMA and NEPA.

**Response:** There are no requirements in NFMA or NEPA to conduct a Recreation/Tourism assessment. The Chugach Forest went the extra step to gather such information for its revision process. The Recreation/Tourism Assessment includes three studies: 1) Recreation and Tourism in Southcentral Alaska: Synthesis of Recent Trends and Prospects; 2) Recreation and Tourism in Southcentral Alaska: Patterns and Prospects; and 3) Outdoor Recreation Participation and Use By Alaskans: Projections 2000-2020. Advance information from the Assessments were used to develop the Recreation Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences sections of Chapter 3 of the DEIS. This section has been rewritten in the FEIS.

**Comment 12:** The cumulative effects section on the inventoried Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is not adequate.

**Response:** Additional information on the cumulative effects has been added to the FEIS. In the cumulative effects section of the FEIS, the recreation analysis determined that the proposed management activities across the Forest would not create substantive changes to the inventoried ROS. Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan identifies monitoring a sample of management areas and reporting cumulative changes in ROS acreage every five years.

### **Subsistence**

**Comment 01:** The Forest Service stated in the DEIS that, "Wilderness will have no effect on subsistence management" (DEIS, Vol. 1, page 3-363, line 4032). This statement does not satisfy the Forest Service's obligation under ANILCA Section 810 to conduct a subsistence evaluation.

**Response:** The effects of all alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative, on subsistence hunting, fishing and trapping was thoroughly evaluated and discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Subsistence. The analysis concluded that the impact of the proposed action combined with the reasonably foreseeable future activities, and activities planned on adjacent lands, would not significantly restrict subsistence use of wild resources within the Chugach National Forest.

**Comment 02:** Please cite subsistence data sources used in the Affected Environment section. The ADF&G Profile Database is referenced in the Direct and Indirect section. Please clarify how the data was used.

**Response:** The ADF&G Profile Database was used to display the use of subsistence resources by rural communities in and adjacent to the Chugach National Forest. The following reports were the