REVISION

chugach national forest land plan & resource management

inside

newsletter

Anchorage, Alaska volume 7 August 1999

ALTERNATIVES

The ♥ of an EIS

By Gary Lehnhausen
Team Leader

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that an environmental impact statement include alternatives to the proposed action.

The alternatives section of an EIS can be called the "linchpin," or in other words, the one component which holds together the elements of a complex process. In the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, alternatives are referred to as the heart of an EIS. An impact statement must set forth those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice. NEPA does not require exhaustive detail regarding alternatives, however it requires sufficient information to enable a clear understanding and consideration of the factors involved. Participants in the alternative development process have a duty to build meaningful alternatives and provide a written description with tangible evidence that their alternative responds to the "situations," "issues," and "interests" better than other alternatives.

Range of Alternatives

In developing a land and resource management plan for a 10- to 15- year period, there are virtually an unlimited number of alternatives that could be evaluated in detail. Consideration of all these is obviously an impossible task. In the process of selecting a reasonable range of alternatives, many possible combinations or permutations of alternatives will not be fully developed. The process of narrowing the possible alternatives to a manageable and reasonable range is appropriate under NEPA. Detailing the infeasibility of every conceivable alternative would risk trivializing the environmental inquiry NEPA intends. Alternatives considered in the revised Forest Plan should demonstrate variation in management emphasis between alternatives.

Alternative Development Schedule

Participants in the alternative development process were asked to provide their alternative proposal to the Forest Service by August 6, 1999.

On August 24, 1999 an interdisciplinary team (IDT) meeting is scheduled to review and discuss the complete set of proposed alternatives, which may be as many as thirty or more. At that meeting the IDT will also begin discussions to develop a process for narrowing the number of proposed alternatives to be considered in detail to a manageable and reasonable set. The process of narrowing the number of alternatives may take about a month. Forest Supervisor, Dave Gibbons will decide which alternatives represent an adequate range of choices that will be analyzed in detail in the EIS.

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NEW SOCIAL SCIENTIST JOINS IDT

The Chugach National Forest welcomes Dr. Lisa Crone to the plan revision IDT as the new social scientist, filling a vacancy created by the reassignment of Pat Reed as the Science Advisor. Lisa brings an excellent mix of skills and experience. A research economist with the USDA Forest Service—Pacific Northwest Research Station, she will direct the completion of the ongoing social and economic assessment among other duties. Prior to working on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem management project as a social scientist with PNW, Lisa served on the faculty at Weber State University. She received her B.A. in economics from the University of Montana and her Ph.D. in economics from the University of Wyoming.

A native of northwest Montana, she is very happy to have the opportunity to enjoy the scenic beauty and many outdoor recreation opportunities available in southcentral Alaska.

THE NEXT STEP!!!

Forest Plan Revision Timeline

1997

Jan
Feb
Mar
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sept
Oct
Nov
Dec

Formal start of ***public involvement***
- Verbal and written comment
- Focus group meetings
- Newsletters

"Collaborative learning" workshops held in Chugach area communities and Ranger districts

1998

Jan
Feb
Mar
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sept
Oct
Nov
Dec

"Analysis of the Management Situation" completed and approved

Conflicting Public/Agency "Interests" (**"Situation Statements"**/Significant NEPA issues) identified and approved

Alternative development **"Toolbox"** complete

1999

Jan
Feb
Mar
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sept
Oct
Nov
Dec

Six Resource/Science Assessments (preliminary information available)
- Dusky Canada Goose
- Social & Economic
- Recreation and Tourism
- Endemic wildlife species
- Kenai Forest Condition
- Kenai Brown Bear

Alternative development complete

2000

Jan
Feb
Mar
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sept
Oct
Nov
Dec

Environmental consequences assessed and evaluated

Draft EIS & Plan prepared and Released for public comment

Final EIS, revised Plan & Record of decision completed and released for public distribution

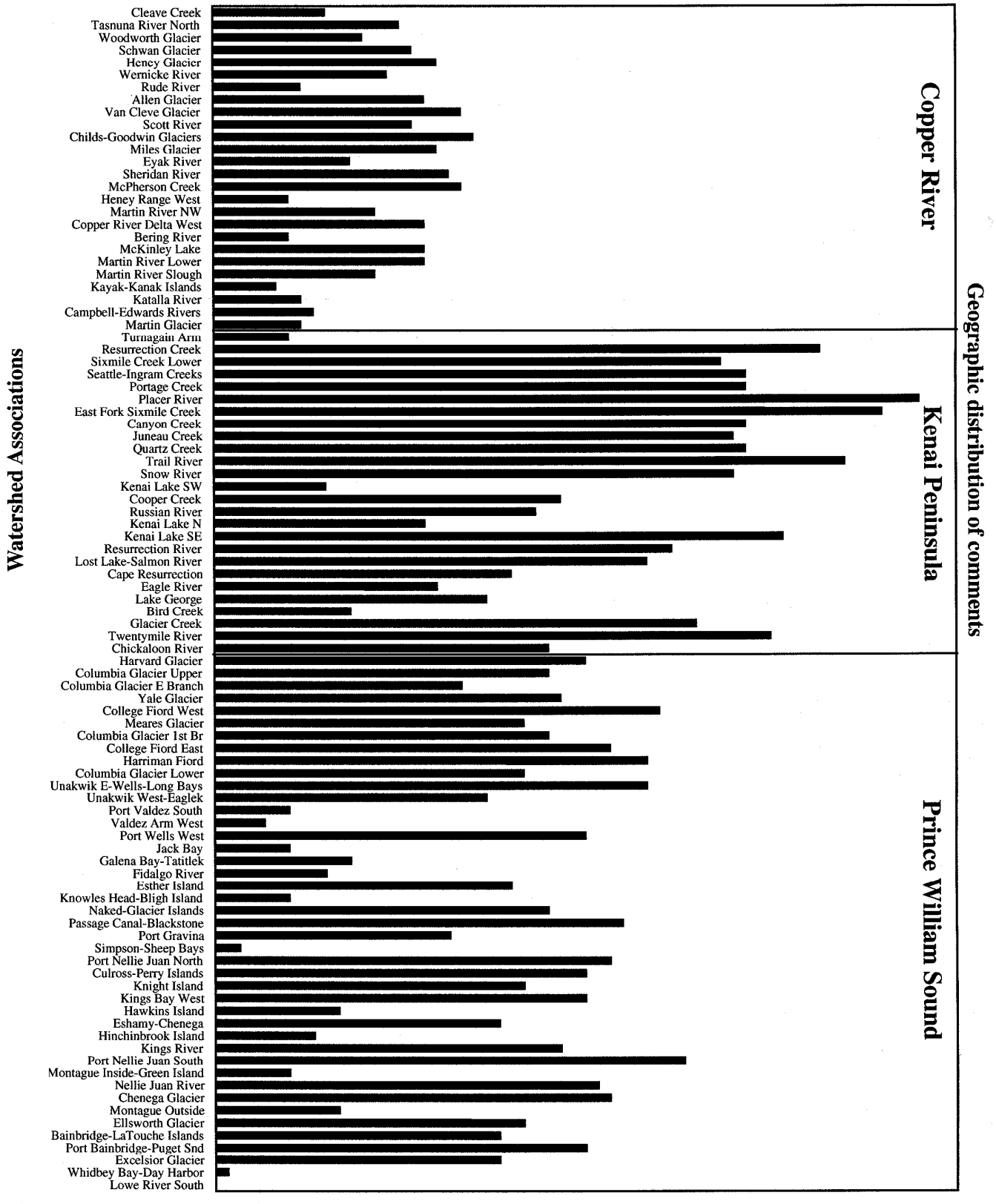
800 WAYS TO MANAGE THE CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

By John DeLapp
Ecologist

During the spring of 1999, a series of collaborative learning workshops took place to obtain public comments on alternative development for the Chugach Forest Plan Revision. More than 350 people and organizations made over 800 statements regarding alternative development. All these comments were entered into a computer database and summarized by location, by interest, and by prescription. These comments are part of the public record and will serve as a tool in the development of a range of Revision alternatives. A number of generalities can be made from the comments (which in their bound form consist of three volumes almost four inches thick):

* The areas receiving the greatest number of comments were on the Kenai Peninsula, in particular, Placer River, East Fork Sixmile Creek, Trail River, and Resurrection Creek watershed associations. **The geographic distribution of comments is displayed by watershed associations in the figure on the next page.**
* Prescriptions from every category 1-5 were applied across the entire Forest. For every watershed on the Forest, there is multiple and often-conflicting public opinion on how that land should be managed.
* Most interests were expressed on a broad landscape scale-e.g., "I would like to see all of western PWS as proposed wilderness or primitive," (or Copper River Delta, or all land east of the Seward Highway); "The plan is too protectionist, I want no wilderness designations."
* Most comments favoring the development of forest products advocate small-scale commercial and personal use timber harvest.
* Many people commented that their highest priority was to manage lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife.
* Many people see the Wilderness, Primitive, and Wild River prescriptions as interchangeable.
* There is strong interest in both nonmotorized and motorized recreation activities. Some people suggested that a permitting system allowing for a 50/50 split in space and time would be fair for motorized and nonmotorized users.
* Many who favor category 1 and 2 prescriptions do not favor large-scale timber harvest, mineral development or tourism development. However, they are in favor of these activities on a small scale within a short distance of the existing road system.
* Those who favor category 3, 4, and 5 prescriptions feel that there is already sufficient land in protected status. They are concerned that there is insufficient roaded access to utilize the Forest resources.
* Many people like the current regulation systems in place at Resurrection Trail and Turnagain Pass. They suggest these types of regulation would provide a fair treatment of motorized and nonmotorized interests. Example: nonmotorized one day per weekend or on a monthly rotation.
* There is considerable support for small-scale commercial development and the Developed Recreation Complex prescription within one mile of existing road system.
* There is an interest in applying more than one prescription per watershed. Several commented that a prescription appropriate along the valley bottom or adjacent to the road system might not be appropriate in the remote upper watershed.
* Many people who favor category 1 and 2 prescriptions favor prescribed burning to improve wildlife habitat.

Number of Comments



Points of View

Some of the opinion pieces appearing in this issue have been prepared by private citizens or nongovernmental organizations outside of the Forest Service to express their ideas about the need for changes in our Forest Plan. As we continue to publish these opinion pieces in future revision newsletters you will notice that their opinions are often in conflict. One of the purposes of the revision process is to study these concerns, understand the differences and recommend appropriate management direction.

These articles do not necessarily reflect the intent nor legal position of the Chugach National Forest. Furthermore, the opinion pieces are presented as submitted with only minor editorial changes and the Chugach National Forest does not guarantee nor necessarily agree with the truth or accuracy of any statement of opinion or fact therein.

Chugach Wilderness Benefits People and Forest Resources

By Nicole Whittington-Evans, Wilderness Society

The Chugach National Forest, our nation's second largest national forest, is comprised of approximately six million acres, is 98% roadless and contains extraordinary wilderness and wildlife values. Currently there is no designated wilderness on the forest. Congress recognized the need for a system of protected wild lands on the Chugach when it set aside the two million acre Nellie Juan/College Fiord Wilderness Study Area to be studied for potential future wilderness designation.

The Wilderness Act, passed by Congress in 1964, established the National Wilderness Preservation System which provides a wealth of values and resources to the American public through the protection of natural ecosystems, including: fish and wildlife habitat, riparian areas, archeological and historic resources, soils, air and water quality, natural quiet, scientific reserves, and spiritual opportunities.

Recent studies suggest that wilderness provides enduring economic benefits to communities as well, by attracting new residents, stimulating the creation of jobs through wildland recreational opportunities, diversifying rural economies, and enhancing property values. Additionally, industries such as sport fishing and hunting, commercial fishing, and ecotourism rely on wilderness resources for their economic sustainability. Fishing, hunting, and many other forms of subsistence and recreational uses are allowed on designated wilderness lands, while development and/or commercial uses are prohibited or restricted.

A survey conducted by Alaska Pacific University in consultation with the Forest Service indicates that a strong majority—72.7%— of individuals from communities throughout the forest favor or strongly favor managing the Chugach National Forest for wilderness. These survey results support the new direction that Chief of the Forest Service, Michael Dombeck, has called for in our national forests. Dombeck's vision underlines the responsibility of the Forest Service to identify and recommend additional wilderness areas where these opportunities exist.

President Theodore Roosevelt established the Chugach National Forest in 1907 in order to protect the outstanding wilderness and wildlife values of the Chugach National Forest, which were threatened by a large-scale mining development in the Copper/Bering River area. Today, the Chugach National Forest is facing parallel threats and needs to follow through with the visions of President Roosevelt, Congress, and Chief Dombeck, and recommend a network of protected wildlands to sustain wilderness and wildlife values on the forest. The public widely supports this type of management direction.

It is time for the Wilderness Study Area and other critical ecological areas of the forest to be permanently protected, so that entire functioning ecosystems can continue to support communities, Alaska qualities of life and healthy and diverse populations of wildlife currently found on the forest. Wildlife, people, and the economy will benefit from wilderness designation on the Chugach National Forest.

Mapping Data, useful tool in Plan Revision

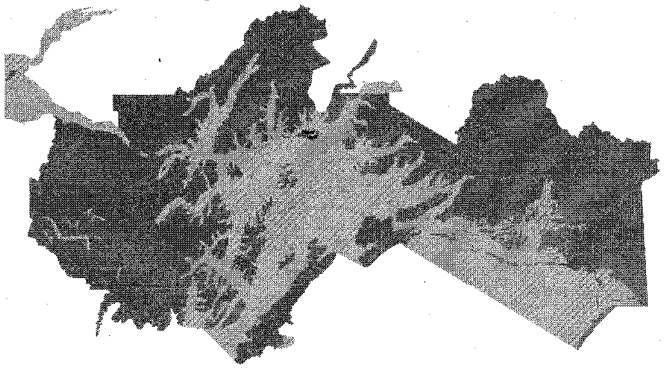
By John Stroud,
Environmental Systems Research Institute

Throughout the last thirty years the United States Forest Service has worked toward increasing public involvement in resource management. Several monumental events contribute to this end. Late in 1969 the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) mandated that Federal agencies increase public involvement through the NEPA process. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 specified that each National Forest shall have a land and resource management plan, often in conjunction with an Environmental Impact Statement. The Chugach National Forest (CNF) has recently been granted permission for a national pilot project to further the integration of public involvement in the management process, namely the Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Recently, the CNF Geographic Information Systems (GIS) staff made available all mapping data being utilized to create the Draft Revision Plan. GIS is a computer information system that links database information to features on a map, making visualization and analysis easier to understand. Such ease of analysis and visualization is a very useful planning tool. Public availability of these is significant due to the fact that much of the Forest Service's planning and analysis for the Revision plan is based on GIS or mapping information. Availability of such data early in the planning reaffirms the CNF commitment for public involvement within the Revision Plan process.

The future of digital land use planning is evolving amidst the Chugach Revision Plan process. The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) in charge of the Revision Plan's update has held several public planning sessions beyond the traditional scoping requirement and continues to keep most IDT meetings open to the public. With release of the Draft Revision Plan the public will have three options for review and comment on the Draft Plan. The traditional paper copy will be printed and available for pick-up or via the US Postal Service. The other two methods are digital: CD-ROM and the Internet.

Both digital dissemination methods allow public review of the Draft Revision Plan and include the actual data used to create that information. Alan Vandiver (IDT member) is often heard saying, "the Forest Service is an information broker." As a broker of information the IDT would like to deliver to the public actual planning data using the same viewing and analysis tools used by CNF personnel. In contrast, the traditional paper copy method does not reveal source data sets in a public setting.

The digital version of the Revision Plan will allow the public to interact with the Plan by displaying alternative and prescription maps, hypertext links between keywords and associated maps, and conduct overlay analysis. Analytical tools will provide ability to dynamically generate acreage, develop visual relationships between layers such as proposed roads and land status, and print newly created maps for submission to the Forest Service as comments.

Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), producers of ArcInfo and ArcView, are assisting the CNF in the pilot project. For more information please contact John Stroud at ESRI Alaska , (907) 344-6613 x11 or jstroud@esri.com.