

REVISION

inside

chugach national forest land
& resource management plan

n e w s i e t t e r

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by Ted Schenck



Gary Lehnhausen handed me a dusty old tool.

“You are a woodworker, do you know what this is,” he asked?

“Sure, Gary. It’s a marking guide” I replied. The tool hadn’t been used for a while but was still ready to make fine lines along the edge of a board.

Gary was going to use it in his discussion of the Toolbox for Alternative Development later that morning. He’s not a woodworker, but he’d figured out what the tool had been used for and wanted to get confirmation. The marking guide had been part of his grandfather’s collection of woodworking tools. Gary had also recognized a plane and a square from the collection and was dusting them off before the meeting.

One hundred-year-old tools to introduce a toolbox for Forest Plan Alternatives. That’s a nifty concept, I thought to myself. Old tools that work fine. Old tools that can be replaced with newer, better tools. Old tools no longer used. New tools to make the job easier. Could I use it to introduce the Toolbox to Chugach Plan Revision Newsletter readers?



So what is a Toolbox for Alternative Development and why would anyone need one?

The Toolbox for Alternative Development is a collection of tools that the Forest Plan Revision Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) has assembled to help people create alternatives for the Chugach Forest Plan Revision. The tools are the ones needed to develop alternatives for the Plan Revision. Having the right tool and the interest to use it is what gets the job done.

The Toolbox has been assembled from a variety of sources. It is intended to be one of the primary resources that anyone could use to develop an Alternative to be considered in the Forest Plan Revision. As the fine print says, “Some assembly required.”



What’s in this toolbox anyway?

The tools in the toolbox are a collection of resource information: alternative development rules, interest statements, situation statements, forest-wide direction, management area prescriptions, decision criteria, geographic information system (GIS) data layers, geographic descriptions, other ownership strategies, and laws.

The information included in the Toolbox will serve as reference material and provide a process for building an alternative. By themselves, these documents will not form an alternative. It takes interested people and some hard work to build the alternative.

Not much different than Gary’s grandfathers old tools! Could you go over the Contents a bit more?

The alternative development rules are the process and content guidelines that help ensure that the alternative is realistic, science-based, and useable. We want to make sure that the hard work results in a good product.

The interest statements and the situation statements are

Continued on page 2.

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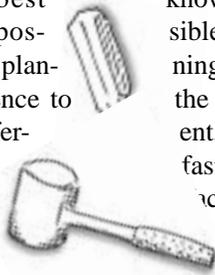
the basic building blocks of the alternatives. This should provide ideas for what to address or emphasize. The forest-wide standards and guidelines are there to provide direction so that the results come out as expected. The square helps keep the corners at right angles, while the scribe helps the craftsman to tailor all the joints to “just right” layout.

Heart of the Toolbox

The management area prescriptions provide the theme and desired conditions for the ecological and social systems. This is where activities and specifics of what and how things may be done on at a specific location or in a specific watershed.”

The decision criteria help form the standards that show how each alternative will measure up to the expectations of the Regional Forester. The Regional Forester has given us this insight to ensure that we’re meeting regional and national standards. Much like using a ruler to measure the final product to see if it’s a good fit, yardsticks have been used to measure for a long time.

The GIS data represent something new in our toolbox. Technology allows us to quickly use the computer to provide information to aid in the alternative crafting. This information represents our best knowledge about what is possible, and what values people have for the planning area. It is this information that links science to the maps. The knowledge base isn’t much different, but the technology makes the work faster. The electric sander can make a surface flat and smooth much like the plane and scraper but it’s quicker.



The geographic descriptions will help understand the capabilities of a specific landscape, the processes that shape the form and function of the forest and landscape, and some idea of how dynamic the landscape processes are.

Other ownership strategies provide insight to how neighboring landowners are intending to manage adjacent lands.

Resource assessments will be a synthesis of existing information with findings and conclusions about status, trends, and relationships of ecosystems, species, and social and economic systems. There are six assessments being done concurrently with the Forest Plan Revision. The Dusky Canada Goose assessment and the Kenai Brown Bear Assessment are independent of the Forest Plan. Four other assessments have been identified as necessary for the completion of the Forest Plan: Forest Condition, Recreation and Tourism, Social and Economic, and Wildlife assessments.

Geographic descriptions, other ownership strategies, and the resource assessments are still being completed. These tools will be in-place for the alternative building (April 1999).

Knowing the significant laws, policy, and agreements for

Plan Implementation provides insight and understanding to the alternative building process. Since the laws and other direction are dynamic, they are being included in the appendix to the toolbox and the Forest Plan for reference. This will make the Forest Plan less bulky and easier to understand by not repeating this direction. Laws and standards have been around for a long time. The craftsman that used old tools knew and obeyed the laws they were part of his toolbox.

Okay, Let’s make sure I got it.

You have assembled these documents to help craft alternatives for the Forest Plan Revision. With these tools, an interested group could develop an alternative which would be usable, science-based, and would address the interests and situations. The decision criteria are standards that will be used to select a preferred alternative. Resource assessments are a synthesis of existing information with findings and conclusions about status, trends, and relationships of ecosystems, species, and social and economic systems.

I understand. How would I get this toolbox?

Toolboxes for Alternative Development will be provided to interested groups as the IDT meets with them to build alternatives. It’s less difficult to use tools if you have a mentor to help!

Realistic Plan Revision

The Revision Team has been working full time on the Plan for slightly over a year. The activity level is cranking-up as we must have more than fifty revision tasks going on simultaneously. Its nice to see these tasks being worked on by a wide variety of people; public individuals and organizations, university staff, Forest Service Research, field personnel etc. Over the countless hours we have worked on the Plan there are three themes that keep driving our efforts, the Chugach Forest Plan Revision will be:

- Realistic to Implement
- Development through Collaborative Efforts
- Organized for Usability

realistic

It is quite a challenge to develop a Plan that serves people while keeping ecosystems in tact. Our strategy is fairly simple, gather as many good ideas as possible and consider the best available science. I am particularly proud of the input and ideas we have received from the public and other agencies. My hat goes off to the many people who have rolled up their sleeves, listened to people with divergent viewpoints and offered solutions instead of criticisms, this Revision will be more realistic because of their efforts. Another focus is field personnel, we have spent a considerable amount of time meeting with the field units trying to understand their needs and determining the best ways to incorporate their ideas. We have also enlisted the help of a number of scientists to work on various resource assessments; Recreation/Tourism, Social/Economic, Wildlife and Forest Condition. The assessment information should start coming together in April.

collaborative

Last winter we received almost a thousand letters addressing the Chugach Revision. A significant number of these comments addressed the need for State and Federal agencies to communicate more effectively and coordinate resource management strategies. We have made coordination with other agencies a priority and have spent considerable time working towards developing compatible management strategies across agency boundaries. We are also working with willing private landowners to discuss compatible land management strategies.”

usable

Developing a Forest Plan involves an incredible amount of detail although the last thing the Revision Team wants is another overweight, underused government document. Our challenge is to slim down the Plan, to necessary information, and organize the document into a useable format. To this end, we have contracted with an information company, Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc., to develop ways to easily access the Forest Plan information. The Revision process will develop Chugach National Forest specific information that the public and resource managers can use. ESRI will work with us to format the information for print, on CD's and on the WEB.

I would like to thank all the people who have participated in the Revision process, its really helping to make a product!!

Alan Vandiver
Revision Team Member

The Chugach National Forest is truly a remarkable area. Vast in size, with its five and a half million acres it is second only to the Tongass National Forest in its incredible wealth of natural resources. Healthy fish and wildlife populations, awe-inspiring scenery, enormous reserves of forest products, minerals, coal, oil and gas, world-class recreation and tourism opportunities, and low levels of visitation compared to other national forests surely mean that there is enough room and opportunity for everyone to go about their business in relative peace and harmony. One would think that these elements would combine to make the Chugach a federal land manager's dream.

Yet the Chugach seems to bristle with conflict and confrontation. Why is this so? With such an abundance of space and with so many resources, virtually all of which are being under utilized, why is it so difficult to craft and implement a forest plan that satisfies all constituents? A review of the hundreds of comments submitted by the public during the revision scoping period reveals that a disproportionate amount of concern is focused on the management of national forest lands for forest products, most of that concern being that too much emphasis is placed on timber production.

The Chugach's own documentation seems to indicate that this high level of concern about timber production is misdirected. In September, 1998 the Chugach National Forest released a document called the Analysis of the Management Situation, or AMS. The AMS was produced to provide the public and the Interdisciplinary Team baseline information on the current condition and use of national forest resources and to provide the information necessary to develop a range of management plan alternatives.

On a national forest with a total land base of over 5.5 million acres the AMS at page 61 tells us that approximately 1.2 million acres, or 22 percent, are in forest lands. Of those 1.2 million acres about 314,000 acres, or about 6 percent of the total Chugach land base, is classified as forest

land tentatively suitable for production of wood products. If the current forest plan is any indication, only about 40% or 125,000 acres of this 314,000 acres will be found suitable for timber management. Does this mean that 125,000 acres of forest will be harvested at one time? Absolutely not. The Chugach is applying a rotation length of 120 years on its coastal forest and 170 years for its interior forests. The rotation length is the amount of time between successive harvests of a particular stand of timber. Using these numbers the forest plan could allow a maximum harvest level of somewhere between 750 and 1,050 acres per year. This is less than two-tenths of one percent of the Chugach land base. The amount of harvest will ultimately be expressed in terms of timber volume and it will be based upon a complex calculation of the Allowable Sale Quantity, biological and technical considerations, and legal and political factors. However, thinking about timber harvest in terms of area gives a good picture of its extent in relation to the entire national forest.

Timber harvest, when used as a land management tool, can contribute greatly to the biological well-being of the forest and the social and economic well-being of local communities. The removal of mature, over-mature and dead overstory trees is a tool widely used to enhance wildlife habitat and forage and to clear the way for regeneration of insect and disease infested stands. The removal of these trees mimics the natural forces of disturbance so necessary to maintain diverse and healthy forest ecosystems. Roads built during timber harvest are used for access to private land, prime

fishing and hunting and other recreational opportunities; logging roads are also easily converted to hiking, snowmachine, mountain bike and ATV trails. Most people would agree that it makes more sense to fund these enhancement, regeneration and access projects through the sale of forest products than to burden the taxpayer by funding these same projects with scarce tax dollars.

Ample forest land is available for a viable forest products industry to co-exist with other industries and users of the forest. When all is said and done timber harvest on the Chugach National Forest hardly poses competition for other users of national forest lands. So, with timber management occurring on so small an area of land as to not compete with other users and with the benefits of timber harvest as a land management tool widely recognized, why does the issue of timber harvest on the Chugach National Forest generate so much controversy?



Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

A review of the information put forward to the public at meetings, in scoping letters and in the Revision Newsletter itself reveals that a portion of the fuel for this fire may be coming from within the Chugach itself. In addition to the underlying and pervasive bias toward a forest-wide theme of preservation and recreation some very disturbing statements

“Make your voice heard. Advocate for a meaningful balance between all forest uses... Regardless of where your specific interests lie we are all better served by a balanced and effective forest plan.”

have been made. For instance, the first Revisions Newsletter asks the question: “Is commercial timber harvesting appropriate on the Chugach National Forest?” It is incredible that a public agency would pose such a question when no such choice actually exists; it is very disturbing that the newsletter would be written in such a way as to mislead the public into thinking that commercial timber harvest is merely a discretionary activity that can be “voted” out of existence.

Another action that has increased the level of conflict is the call for nominations for additions to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This call has been made without the full disclosure that the question of Chugach’s ability to make

recommendations under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has not yet been settled. Creating the false illusion that the Chugach can legitimately be a “recreation forest” with an abundance special designations, no timber production, no mineral production, no tourism industry and little or no access can only raise the expectations of a few very vocal groups advocating preservation rather than wise use of public resources. Unfortunately, it seems the ground work for an expensive, counter-productive and contentious revision process is being laid from within the organization itself.

So what can interested individuals do at this point in the process? Alternative management plans are currently being developed by the Interdisciplinary Team. You will be invited to comment on the draft alternatives when they are finished. In the meantime, the Interdisciplinary Team meetings are open to the public and everyone is encouraged to participate. These meetings are very informative and the Interdisciplinary Team does allow the public to voice their concerns. However, more voices advocating a balanced forest plan need to be heard. Make your voice heard. Advocate for a meaningful balance between all forest uses, from tourism to forest products to mining and recreation. Regardless of where our specific interests lie we are all better served by a balanced and effective forest plan.



by Ann Raup

In places as exotic as Tibet and as close to home as Colorado, travelers hike for days through spectacular, mountainous areas and spend their nights in staffed huts where a comfortable bed and other amenities await them. Hut-to-hut systems in New Zealand, New Hampshire, the Alps and Scandinavia are jewels in their mountains and are heavily used by locals and a substantial draw to tourists. We would like to foster this tradition and opportunity in Alaska.

The Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts Association was created to bring this alternative experience for exploring the backcountry to Alaska. We seek to provide an experience of Alaska that takes people into country rich in animal life, extraordinary landscapes, natural and cultural history, and allow them to do that without carrying the heavy backpacks associated with backcountry travel. We will build a series of modest, multi-party cabins that will be linked by a low-impact trail through the Alaska wilderness.

This mode of travel allows people to experience all of what the mountains and their weather systems can give and still have a refuge at the end of the day. We believe the hut-to-hut system allows many people in different age groups and

different abilities to enjoy the outdoors. It provides shelter from the weather, the bugs and the bears—elements that cause many people to not venture out into the woods.

An important component of the Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts concept is education. The trail will offer a setting for multi-day education field trips with continuously unfolding environments to experience and study. The hut will allow the luxury of a “classroom”, where participants can comfortably read, write and discuss.

The Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts Association started as one person’s vision of bringing huts to Alaska. It has expanded into board of enthusiastic hikers, skiers, climbers and outdoors people who are working in many veins to help this happen. The group is incorporated and applying for nonprofit tax-exempt status with the IRS. We are exploring many sites for a hut-to-hut system in southcentral Alaska. We have forged a partnership with the Park Service’s Rivers and Trails branch to facilitate our growth into a strong nonprofit group are working with the Forest Service during the next five years.

For more information, contact John Wolfe 279-4663 or Anne Raup 279-4308 or email huts@alaska.net.





The Chugach Forest Plan, which provides guidance for activities within the Nation's second largest National Forest is being revised to reflect changes since it was written in 1984. Forest Plans establish direction, management requirements, and make recommendations that reflect the management direction of the Forest. The goal of the forest planning process is to achieve a reasonable management plan that maintains ecosystem processes, cares for forest resources, and is responsive to public needs and concerns.

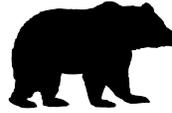
One of the basic steps in the revision process is the collection of resource inventory data and information, the compilations up-to-date information, facts, and figures on which the plan is based. Not only are biological facts about ecosystems necessary, but so are the social, recreational, and economic facts that affect the goods and services they produce. Six assessments have been identified as necessary to appraise the state of important forest resources. Two resource assessments, the Dusky Canada Goose Assessment and the Kenai Brown Bear Assessment are ongoing and are independent of the Forest Plan Revision. Four resource assessment have been identified as necessary for the completion of the Forest Plan: A Forest Condition Assessment, a Wildlife Assessment, a Recreation and Tourism Assessment, and a Social and Economic Assessment. The results of four assessments will be available April 1999.

Ongoing Resource Assessmentss

Dusky Canada Goose Assessment

A dusky Canada goose conservation assessment has been commissioned through a multi-agency effort under the direction of Dusky Canada Goose Subcommittee of the Pacific Flyway Council and called for in the recently revised Pacific Flyway Management Plan for the Dusky Canada Goose. The states of Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, US Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Northwest and Alaska Regions, and the Alaska Region of the USDA Forest Service are cooperating with this effort. Dr. Robert Bromley is the lead author in preparation of the conservation assessment. A draft of the conservation assessment will be circulated for Subcommittee technical review in fall 1998. The final document may be available by midwinter 1998-99.

Kenai Brown Bear Assessment



A Kenai brown bear conservation assessment is in preparation as part of a multi-agency effort. The Interagency Brown Bear Study Team (Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Kenai Fjords National Park, and Chugach National Forest represented) is developing the conservation assessment. Data from an in-progress field study on Kenai Peninsula brown bears will provide a basis for the assessment. A draft conservation assessment will be circulated for agency policy review in fall 1999. The final document may be available by midwinters 1999-2000.

Proposed Resource Assessments:

Forest Condition Assessment

An assessment of the best scientific information available describing the condition the forested lands of the Chugach National Forest with particular emphasis on the forests of the Kenai Peninsula will support a revision objective of maintaining the forests within the existing natural range of variability and managing the forests to maintain the composition, structure, and function within the identified desired condition. The assessment will focus on plant community succession, disturbance regimes, fire history, and regeneration and growth rates of timber species. Components of the assessment include:



1. A review of the forest condition of the Chugach National Forest, with emphasis on the bark beetle infested forests of the Kenai Peninsula.
2. A description of plant biodiversity of the Forest.
3. The development of a Kenai Peninsula forest succession model.
4. A description of current and future mortality, regeneration, and growth rates of important silvicultural tree species.
5. The development of a fire history map of the Kenai Peninsula.
6. The development of a predictive fire and fuel loading model for the forest of the Kenai Peninsula.
7. A description of past, present, and predicted future disturbance regimes of the Chugach National Forest.

Wildlife Assessment

Subspecific variation and unique distribution patterns of wildlife are characteristic of the Chugach National Forest on the Kenai Peninsula, the mainland and islands of Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta in Southcentral Alaska. Maintaining viable, well-distributed populations of wildlife across this 2.4 million-hectare landscape is required by the 1976 National Forest Management Act and offers a significant challenge to the USDA Forest Service. A process, based on the principles of conservation biology, was designed to assist the Chugach National Forest in meeting this requirement. Nine of the 269 wildlife species and endemic subspecies that occur on this National Forest were identified as having a potential risk to their persistence or distribution (i.e., Montague Island hoary marmot (*Marmota caligara sheldoni*), dusky Canada goose (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo katschemakensis*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), black oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus pambasileus*), northern red-backed vole (*Clethrionomys rutilus insularis*, and Montague Island tundra vole (*Microtus oeconomus elymocetes*). Conservation assessments are being implemented for selected species. Each assessment will be a synthesis of the best available comprehensive, scientific and technical information describing life history, habitat associations, and conservation status of the species. Findings from these assessments will provide supporting documentation for development, analysis, and review of management related to the conservation of these species.



Social and Economic Assessment

This Chugach National Forest will be conducting social and economic assessment of 14 local communities located within or near its boundaries, including Anchorage, as part of its Forest Plan Revision. The purpose of the assessments is to give Chugach forest planners a better understanding of, and ways to measure the nature and extent of effects which different forest management alternatives might have on the communities. Possible social and economic effects might range from changes in community economies and employment to resident life-styles and perceptions of their quality of life as influenced by the Forest. The resiliency of the local communities to accommodate changes in forest management will be on emphasis of the assessments.

Recreation and Tourism Assessment

The Chugach provides a broad range of recreation opportunities for both locals and non-local visitors. A Recreation and Tourism Assessment will be conducted to increase our knowledge of the recreation and tourism industry. This assessment will examine the current patterns of recreation and tourism and information on the structure of the tourism industry, including recent trends and the factors behind these trends. The assessment will also look at the current and projected supply of recreation/tourism opportunities and the projected demand for recreation opportunities for 12 selected activities: sight-seeing, recreation cabin use, hiking, camping, boating, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, snowmachine and all terrain vehicle use, mountain biking, heli-skiing/heli-hiking, visitor centers, and hunting/fishing. With this information, the assessment will then project prospective industry developments in response to anticipated demand, and will identify potential management alternatives.



THE NEXT STEP!!!



1999

January	Update Revision Toolbox
February	Build Rough-cut alternatives
March	Collaborative Learning workshops
April-May	Refine alternatives
June	Incorporate Information from Science Assessments

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