



NEWS

TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-FOREST SERVICE

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Environmental Assessment Released on Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan

Wrangell, AK - The Wrangell Ranger District on the Tongass National Forest has released the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan, outlining alternatives regarding the amount of commercial outfitter and guide use which may be authorized on the district. A decision notice to finalize the Plan is expected in September of 2009.

The Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan project area consists of the National Forest System lands included in the Wrangell Ranger District of the Tongass National Forest (TNF), totaling approximately 1.7 million acres in central Southeast Alaska.

For the purposes of this project, the district is divided into 13 study areas. Each study area is evaluated for the level of potential use at which the environment or a forest user's experience may be impacted. This level of use is reflected in Recreation Visitor Days (RVD's), a measure of recreation activity.

Three alternatives are explored in the analysis: a No Action alternative, a Proposed Action alternative, and a Preferred alternative (Wilderness Allocation alternative).

All alternatives are based on a Carrying Capacity Report. The No Action alternative would maintain the level of RVD's available to commercial operators as established in the 2004 update of the 1997 Stikine Area Outfitter and Guide EA. Both the Proposed Action alternative and the Preferred alternative reflect changes in study area boundaries and historical use patterns. Both alternatives reflect increases in the amount of commercial use that may be authorized. The Preferred alternative, also known as the Wilderness Allocation alternative, proposes allocating fewer Recreation Visitor Days than the Proposed Action alternative to outfitters and guides in the Stikine-LeConte and South Etolin Wilderness areas. Overall, the two new alternatives allow for growth in all study areas except for one.

The Notice of Availability will be published in the Ketchikan Daily News, which will begin the 30-day comment period. Written comments can be sent to the Wrangell District Ranger, or Diane O'Brien, Special Use Administrator, Attn. Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan EA, U.S. Forest Service, PO Box 51, Wrangell, AK, 99929-0051. Comments may also be e-mailed to comments-alaska-tongass-wrangell@fs.fed.us, with Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan in the subject line. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period.

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The Wrangell Outfitter and Guide Management Plan EA will be available on Friday, July 17, both on the Tongass National Forest website, at www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/projects/projects.shtml, and at the Wrangell Ranger District office, 907-874-2323.