



United States Department of Agriculture

Treadwell Ditch Trail Bridges Construction

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact



Forest Service
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest
Sitka Ranger District

R10-MB-794d

April 2016

Cover Photo: Collapsed bridge over Eagle Creek. The dam is the remaining structure from the 1880's construction of the Treadwell Ditch. It was used to elevate water levels of Eagle Creek so they flowed into the ditch and to the Treadwell Mine Complex

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Introduction

This project is needed because the condition of the Treadwell Ditch Trail presents safety concerns and does not provide a quality recreation experience or resource protection.

The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of two alternatives. The Treadwell Ditch Trail (NFS Trail # 33718) is a historic trail on Douglas Island near Douglas, Alaska (Figure A at the end of this document). Downtown Juneau, Alaska is about three miles to the southeast. The trail lies generally atop the overburden of a ditch constructed in the 1880's. The ditch was designed to collect and transport water to the Treadwell Mine Complex in Douglas where it was used to generate electricity for mining operations.

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I choose to select Alternative 2 from the February 2016 Treadwell Ditch Trail Bridges Construction Environmental Assessment (Treadwell EA) as the Selected Alternative. We proposed minor modifications in the Design Elements in Alternative 2 to be responsive to comments in the February 2016 EA as compared to those shown in the December 2015 EA. The modifications included:

- allowing for a maximum of 24-inch wide trail tread instead of the original 18-inch trail tread proposal
- allowing for bridges up to 5 feet wide where terrain allows and historical structures won't be impacted
- committing to reviewing many bridges with Trail Mix representatives and staff archaeologists to ensure an appropriate crossing while still protecting the historical structure
- designing bridges to avoid steps in bridge approaches

More details on these project design elements are located in the Best Management Practices, Design Elements, Mitigation Measures and Monitoring section of the February 2016 EA and this decision. Forest Service resource specialists reviewed these modifications. Edits were made to the Heritage and Recreation sections of the EA; the other resource specialists found that there was no or very little change in effects from their initial effects analysis. Please see the February 2016 EA for further details.

My decision includes implementing design elements, monitoring, and mitigation, and following Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) direction and Forest Service policy. These are important means of minimizing effects to resources and people and helping to maintain the resources and experiences the public values.

In this decision, we will:

- Improve 38 crossings on the Treadwell Ditch Trail between the Blueberry Hill Access Trail and the Bonnie Brae Access Trail. Construction activities will include building structures such as shallow water fords, culverts, or bridges or trail reroutes that will avoid the crossing. Approximately 6 of the 19 historic diversion structures will be addressed with culverts or fords because these six have very little remaining historic integrity. The 13 remaining diversion structures will be addressed with bridges that don't impact the historic structures. Figure A at the end of this decision displays the entire trail and the 38 crossings.
- Excavate borrow pits at some locations where culverts are used. Imported gravel will be used to bed the culverts and the borrow material will be used to recreate the berm when back-filling culverts in those areas where the berm has washed out. Borrow material will not come from the berm;
- Replicate the ditch and diversion structure framing in a section of ditch near Kowee Creek. Include an interpretive panel describing the history and function of the Treadwell Ditch;
- Construct approximately 350 feet of new trail to reroute around a failed section of berm atop which

the trail tread runs north of the Eagle Creek crossing (Figure B). Another option being considered at this location is to bridge the failure in the berm. This option requires more analysis to determine feasibility and cost;

- Fill up to 300 feet of ditch and stabilize the bank on the south approach to Eagle Creek to compensate for a section of berm that has slid into the river ravine;
- Reconstruct an existing informal 1,175-foot long reroute which bypasses a steep gorge section where there was historically a wooden flume just south of Bonnie Brae (see Figure C at end of this decision);
- “Harden” approximately 500 feet of muddy trail section by installing an 24-inch wide gravel tread through a muskeg just north of the Kowee Creek Bridge; and
- Install trail signs, where needed, for navigation or safety.

The major components of the historic site are the ditch, the berm, and associated wooden structures such as the ditch walls and top, and the diversion structure framing. Together these structures make up the historic character of the site. It is our intent that future work and maintenance will ensure that those structures define the character of the trail as well. Except where proposed, the berm will remain unchanged and the trail tread will maintain its generally narrow character. The trail class, designed use, allowed and prohibited uses will not change under this proposal. To maintain the historic character of the trail, the trail will stay a hiking trail, though it will also meet Forest Service minimum design parameters for biking and skiing trails.

Ongoing maintenance of the trail, including some tree and brush trimming, hardening the trail with gravel, or removal of down logs, will occur and continue.

Time and Duration of Activity

Two or three major crossings are expected to be addressed during the summer of 2016 depending on final cost estimates and available funds. Work on the reroute and limited tread work repairs is expected to begin in 2016 and last up to 2 years. The remaining crossings will be addressed in subsequent years, contingent on acquiring funds.

Parts of the trail will be closed to public use during construction as long as necessary to safeguard the public, personnel, and equipment used to improve the crossings.

Best Management Practices, Design Elements, Mitigation Measures and Monitoring

Best Management Practices

Project design and implementation will adhere to the following Best Management Practices (BMPs) and site-specific design elements to avoid or reduce impacts of the Proposed Action.

Alaska (Region 10) Best Management Practices

12.6 Riparian Area Designation and Protection - Special attention will be given to land and vegetation approximately 100' from the edges of all perennial streams, lakes, and other bodies of water. No management practices causing detrimental changes in water temperature or chemical composition, blockages of water course, or deposits of sediment will be permitted within these areas which seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.

12.8 Oil Pollution Prevention and Servicing/Refueling Operations - Oil delivery and storage facilities will be located, designed, constructed, and maintained in a manner that minimizes the potential for contamination of surface or subsurface soil and water resources. Locate refueling sites well away from wetlands and stream channels.

Contractors should follow the guidelines in the Soil and Water Conservation Handbook (1996) regarding storage and servicing/refueling of oil and hazardous substances.

12.17 Revegetation of Disturbed Areas - Provide ground cover to minimize soil erosion. This practice is used to stabilize the surface of disturbed or barren areas by establishing vegetation. Site-specific erosion control plans will be developed by the contractor and the Contracting Officer.

13.16 Stream Channel Protection - Provide site-specific stream protection prescriptions: maintain natural flow regime; provide for unobstructed passage of rainfall flows; maintain integrity of the riparian buffer to filter sediments and other pollutants; maintain natural channel integrity to protect aquatic habitat; prevent adverse changes to the natural stream temperature regime.

14.2 Location of Transportation Facilities - Ensure soil and water resources protection measures are considered when locating roads and trails. Avoidance of sensitive or fragile areas is a primary consideration incorporated into the location of transportation facilities. Avoid riparian areas, wetlands, and floodplains to the extent practicable.

14.3 Design of Transportation Facilities - Incorporate site-specific soil and water resource protection measures into the design of roads and trails. The trail should be designed to meet safety requirements and minimize soil movement and sedimentation. Trails should be designed to drain with the appropriate use of drainage structures.

14.5 Road and Trail Erosion Control Plan - Develop Erosion Control Plans for road or trail projects to minimize or mitigate erosion, sedimentation, and resulting water quality degradation prior to the initiation of construction and maintenance activities. Ensure compliance through effective contract administration and timely implementation of erosion control measures.

Sedimentation is minimized by effectively planning for erosion control. Roads and trails require a variety of erosion control measures. Many erosion control practices will not only protect water quality, but also maintain road prism integrity and reduce maintenance costs, and improve usability.

14.6 Timing Restrictions for Construction Activities - Minimize erosion potential by restricting the operating schedule and conducting operations during lower risk periods.

14.9 Drainage Control to Minimize Erosion and Sedimentation - Minimize the erosive effects of concentrated water flows from transportation facilities and the resulting degradation of water quality through proper design, and construction of drainage control systems. Stabilizing the road prism and adjacent disturbed areas to minimize degradation of water quality from sediment generated by the erosive effects of surface runoff.

14.12 Control of Excavation and Sidecast Material - Erodible material will not be deposited in surface waters. End-haul material away from site as designated by the Forest Service Administrator.

14.14 Control of In-Channel Operations - Remove any construction-caused debris from the stream immediately in a manner that will cause the least disturbance to the stream course.

14.17 Bridge and Culvert Design and Installation - Structures shall be designed to minimize streambed and stream bank erosion to maintain water quality and fisheries resources. Bridges and bottomless arches are preferred structures on Class I and II streams.

14.18 Development and Rehabilitation of Gravel Sources and Quarries - Minimize sediment from borrow pits, gravel sources, and quarries, and to limit channel disturbance from gravel sources permitted for development within floodplains.

16.1 Recreation Facilities Planning and Location - Protect soil and water resources through appropriate planning, design and location of recreational facilities. Wetlands, meadows, and stream banks are particularly susceptible to damage from foot traffic and need special attention when constructing trails,

campsites, and cabin sites. Trails are also susceptible to erosion from runoff that increases when hikers make shortcuts off the main trail (See BMP 16.4).

16.4–Trail Construction and Maintenance - Minimize soil erosion and water quality problems originating from trails and their drainage structures. Use standard engineering practices (see BMP 14) that include location, construction, maintenance, restriction of use, relocation, and so forth. A variety of techniques can be used to harden trails and campsites in wet areas, and to reduce erosion on hillslopes.

Each District will develop a trail maintenance plan that determines level, timing, and frequency of maintenance.

National Best Management Practices (BMPs)

AqEco-2: Avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to water quality when working in aquatic ecosystems.

AqEco-3: Design and implement pond and wetlands projects in a manner that increases the potential for success in meeting project objectives and avoids, minimizes, or mitigates adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources.

AqEco-4: Design and implement stream channel and lake shoreline project in a manner that increases the potential for success in meeting project objectives and avoids, minimizes, or mitigates adverse effects to soil, water quality and riparian resources. Add or remove rocks, wood, or other material in streams only if such action maintains or improves stream condition, provides for safety and stability at bridges and culverts, is needed to avoid or minimize excessive erosion of streambanks, or reduces flooding hazards. Choose vegetation appropriate to the site to provide streambank stabilization and protection adequate to achieve project objectives.

FAC-6: Avoid or minimize short- and long-term effects to soil and water resources by preventing releases of hazardous materials.

Plan-2: Use the project planning, environmental analysis, and decision-making processes to incorporate water quality management BMPs into project design and implementation.

Plan-3: To maintain and improve or restore the condition of land around and adjacent to waterbodies in the context of the environment in which they are located, recognizing their unique values and importance to water quality while implementing land and resource management activities.

Rec-1: Use the applicable recreation planning process to develop measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources during recreation activities.

Rec-4: Avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources by controlling soil erosion, erosion of trail surface materials, and water quality problems originating from construction, maintenance, and use of motorized and nonmotorized trails.

Road-1: Avoid or minimize adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources from fuels, lubricants, cleaners, and other harmful materials discharging into nearby surface waters or infiltrating through soils to contaminate groundwater resources during equipment refueling and servicing activities.

Project Design Elements

The following are features of the design intended to address BMPs and reduce the potential for degradation of habitat and resources during project implementation.

- Crossings and trail work will be designed to protect heritage resources. To that end, bridge width will be determined based on terrain and vulnerability of historic features. Generally bridges less than 10 feet long that are over shallow depressions less than 4 feet deep will be 3 feet wide. However, bridges less than 10' will be reviewed by Forest Service recreation and heritage staff and a Trail Mix

representative on a site specific basis. If terrain permits and historic features will not be affected, these shorter bridges may be built up to 5 feet wide. Terrain may limit bridge width where the cross section of the berm is too narrow to support the abutments of a wider bridge. Bridges greater than 10 feet long will be 5 feet in width. Longer bridges are intended to be wider for increased safety and ease of passage; whereas people are less likely to encounter others on a shorter bridge. An effort will be made to avoid steps in bridge approaches and other areas through the use of low profile bridge decks and fill added to slope approaches to bridges. Culverts or fords may be installed where historic features or fisheries won't be adversely affected.

- If a previously unidentified archaeological or historic site(s) is encountered, the contractor will discontinue work in the general area of the site(s) and notify the contracting officer immediately. The contracting officer will notify a Forest Service archeologist to determine further action.
- Taller guard rails will be constructed on the larger bridges that are elevated high above stream channels to provide enough guard rail for use when deep snow is on the bridge. At least one guard rail will be constructed on smaller crossings to aid in crossing when the bridge deck is crowned with snow.
- Trail design will include the following:
 - Possible bridge materials under consideration – pressure treated lumber, pressure treated glu-lam, Fiber Reinforced Polymer (FRP)
 - Trail tread width - maximum width of 24 inches
 - Trail surface material - Typically native, though where protrusions are greater than 3 inches and continuous, contributing to difficult walking conditions, or where the tread is degraded into muddy conditions, an imported gravel surface will be used to repair the tread. Where possible, the tread will be realigned atop the berm if it has migrated off the top of the berm.
 - Vegetative clearing height – 8 feet, vegetative clearing width – 6 feet
 - Signage – route identification/destination signage at junctions, creeks identified at major bridge crossings (Kowee, Eagle, North Fork Eagle, Falls, Neilson), interpretive signs in a few key locations. Refer to the Forest Service sign and poster guidelines (EM-7100-15) the recreation opportunity spectrum design guidelines for signage direction.
- Prevent invasive plant establishment during construction by washing tools and equipment prior to first entering an un-infested area, or when re-entering an un-infested area from an area infested by invasive plants.
- Designate refueling, service, and staging areas well away (>10 feet) from surface waters and utilize fuel absorbent pads under gas tanks during refueling to minimize potential for soil and water contamination from fuel spills. Have additional fuel and oil absorbent pads on site and accessible in the event of a fuel or oil spill.
- Recommend the use of vegetable oil or other biodegradable fuel for chainsaw bar lube when practicable during construction near surface waters.
- Schedule, to the extent practicable, construction activities to avoid direct soil and water disturbance during periods of the year when high precipitation is likely.
- Coordinate with fisheries and wildlife biologists to determine appropriate construction timing windows.
- Utilize erosion and sediment material such as silt fences and jute logs while construction activities are taking place.
- Use coconut fiber matting for erosion control as an alternative to straw bales when available and practical.
- Routinely inspect construction site to verify that erosion controls are implemented and functioning as designed.
- Use native material when available. See current seeding guidelines (FSM 2080 TNF Supplement, Exhibit 2) for detailed procedures and appropriate mixes.

- Prevent invasive plant establishment during construction by washing tools and equipment prior to first entering an un-infested area, or when re-entering an un-infested area from an area infested by invasive plants.
- Helicopter flights bringing materials to project sites will avoid eagle nests by 1000 feet during the breeding season per the USFWS Bald Eagle Management Guidelines.
- Prior to March 1, provide the wildlife biologist with planned areas of work for the year, and estimated dates of work to allow for scheduling of goshawk surveys, if needed. Juneau wildlife staff will survey for goshawk nesting if the following occur: trail work is scheduled to occur 1) in a location with high probability of nesting 2) during the nesting season, or if 3) sightings and behavior of goshawk suggest nearby goshawk nesting.
- If any previously undiscovered endangered, threatened, proposed, or sensitive species or key habitats for any Management Indicator Species or other species identified in this document are encountered at any point in time prior to or during the implementation of this project, a District Biologist will be consulted and appropriate measures will be enacted.
- Include cross drains when building gravel trail in wetlands.

Mitigation

- Closure or delay notices will be posted in advance at trailheads. Public service announcements will be made to warn users to plan accordingly.
- Properly stabilize or rehabilitate disturbed areas following construction.
- Revegetate bare soil resulting from project activity if prompt natural regeneration is not expected.

Monitoring

The following monitoring is expected to occur to assure that effects are limited.

- Inspect areas where gravel or other materials (including seed) have been imported for 2-3 years afterwards to ensure no invasive plants are present. See item number 10 in FSM 2080 TNF Supplement, Exhibit 1.
- Trail crews will monitor use and trail conditions for 3 – 5 years after bridge replacement begins under this proposal to determine future trail work needs in locations with unimproved sections of tread.
- Design elements described in this EA will be incorporated into specifications that will drive detailed planning and actual work. Forest Service Recreation planning staff will monitor work at each of the crossings, and monitor regularly during all phases of the project. Heritage program staff will closely coordinate with recreation planning staff doing periodic field visits as necessary to ensure work is aligned with elements in the EA that protect heritage resources. Monitoring will also assure Best Management Practices are being applied.

Permits and Other Requirements

The Forest Service will obtain concurrence from Alaska Department of Fish and Game for in-water work in fish bearing streams, including bridge replacement and culvert removal. A Nation-wide section 404 Permit will be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the fill needed along the trail reroute.

Rationale for the Decision

I chose this alternative because it best meets the purposes and needs for this project while protecting resources. This decision will allow us to improve safety and heritage concerns and provide a higher quality recreation experience on the Treadwell Ditch Trail by:

- Improving safety and addressing deferred maintenance and many functional challenges of the trail by reducing obstacles at stream crossings between Blueberry Hills access and Bonnie Brae access of the Treadwell Ditch Trail.

- Reducing or preventing erosion issues in and around streams and through wetland.
- Providing safe, well-marked trail routes around impassable gorges.
- Assuring and preserving the integrity of this historic site, and avoiding impacts to the historic dams and other features at major crossings.
- Preserving the historical character and feel of the Trail.
- Preserving many of the original historical stream diversion structures on the Trail.
- Educating the public on the history and function of the Treadwell Ditch through interpretative signage.

I chose to include the proposed modifications in the February 2016 EA because I and my staff believe these modifications are responsive to the concerns and interests of the community while still preserving the important historic elements of the trail.

Additionally, in these times of reduced funding for recreation projects, Secure Rural Schools Act funding will pay for the replacement of some major bridges and trail work on the Treadwell Ditch Trail while funding is available.

Other Alternatives Considered and Why They Were Not Selected

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered taking no action (EA page 6).

Alternative 1

The No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) was not selected because under the No Action alternative, the trail and bridges would remain in their current condition. Safety concerns, deferred maintenance, and the functionality of the trail would not be addressed. Damage to heritage resources would continue, and the anticipated beneficial effects of public education and the hoped for increased interest in and concern for historic properties in general, will not be realized. Ongoing effects to wetlands and fisheries would continue.

Public Involvement and Scoping

The Forest Service mailed a scoping letter requesting scoping comments on this project in February 2014 and held a public open house on this project in March 2014. The letter was mailed to over 200 individuals via email and postal mail. The Douglas Indian Association and Goldbelt Incorporated have been invited to participate and offered ongoing, informal opportunities to discuss and consult on this project during tribal updates. No consultation has been requested and no tribal comments have been provided to this point. Consultation and discussion have occurred with State of Alaska agencies.

Eleven individuals and agencies provided comments on this project during scoping and approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting to learn and ask questions about the projects.

The EA was provided as a weblink to 115 people in December 2015 including the tribe and tribal corporation, all who commented on this project, and all those who were on the electronic mailing list. A 30-day comment period was provided to the public after the Treadwell EA was released. The legal notice announcing the 30-day comment period was published in the Juneau Empire on December 20, 2015. When we learned of a national outage of project webpages (including Treadwell) for 3-4 days near the end of the comment period, we made an effort to email the EA to those who told us of the broken weblink. Additionally, a 6-day comment period that began on January 20, 2016 was announced via an email and mail to all on the project mailing list and in a January 22, 2016 article in the Juneau Empire. This additional comment period gave the public the opportunity to learn more about and comment on the proposal.

Fifty-one individuals and agencies provided comments on this project during the 30-day comment period. Comments received during scoping and the 30-day comment period provided the public a chance to gain standing to participate in the predecisional review and objection process (36 CFR 218 – Project- Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process). A brief summary of comments received during the 30-day comment period and the Forest Service response to those comments is included below. A more thorough description of comments received during the 30-day comment period and our responses can be found on the project webpage.

Many comments expressed a concern that the trail would exclude multiple uses because the trail design was for “hikers”. We recognize that the Treadwell Ditch Trail is highly valued and used by a variety of non-motorized users including bikers, runners, skiers, hunters, snowshoers, hikers, and others. The EA clarifies that all non-motorized uses are allowed on the Treadwell Ditch Trail. The EA also states that allowed uses will not change under this proposal. Thus, multiple uses of the Treadwell Ditch Trail will continue to be permitted into the future. In terms of design, the designed use of “hiker” is not intended to limit other currently allowed uses. The purpose of this designed use is to guide future work with a chosen set of design parameters that fit into the terrain and setting of the area. As proposed in the EA and described in this decision, the trail design exceeds the Forest Service minimum standards for “hiker” trail while meeting the Forest Service minimum standards for a “biking” and “ski” trail. We expect our actions to make the Treadwell Ditch Trail more accessible for all non-motorized users.

Many comments suggested that the proposed trail and bridge widths were not wide enough for multiple use activities and should be wider. To be responsive to those concerns, the EA and this decision include modifications in the trail design. We will allow for a maximum of 24-inch wide trail tread instead of the original 18-inch trail tread proposal. Additionally, the section in the EA and my decision has been clarified to allow for bridges up to 5 feet wide where terrain allows and historical structures won’t be impacted. Where bridges are less than 10 feet long (and proposed for 3-foot width), we commit to working cooperatively with a representative from Trail Mix and Forest Service recreation and archaeology staff to ensure safe and appropriate crossings which meet the dual goals of trail improvement and protection of historical resources. We will also design bridges to avoid steps in bridge approaches.

Commenters also felt that the protection of heritage resources was emphasized over recreational values. Our intention for Treadwell Ditch Trail is to both preserve the historic elements and improve the access for all non-motorized uses. To that end the EA trail and bridge design elements were adjusted to be responsive to the public’s concerns. Nonetheless, the Treadwell Ditch Trail is unique in that it corresponds to an historic property. It is, in fact, that history that has imbued the trail with the characteristics so many enjoy today. As a Federal agency, the Forest Service is required by the National Historic Preservation Act to consider effects to historic properties. While we can select where our recreation sites are located, we cannot select the location of historic sites. Our intention is to improve access on Treadwell Ditch Trail for all non-motorized users while at the same time protecting this historic resource. The recreation staff worked very closely with staff archeologists to properly balance historical preservation with recreational interests in designing proposed upcoming work on this trail.

Some commenters felt that the Proposed Action would not address user safety. The improved crossings proposed by this project, along with the proposed minor adjustments tread width and bridge width, are expected to improve safety on this trail.

Additional comments received during the 30-day comment period included comments on process, heritage, and project design. Whenever possible, we used the comments on this project to improve the project or the analysis. In some cases, the comments were outside the scope of this analysis so they were not given further consideration.

Comments were also received during scoping. As discussed in the EA under Agencies and Persons Contacted, some of the scoping comments were used to refine and adjust the Proposed Action and clarify the Purpose and Need for the proposal. Whenever possible, we used the comments on this project to

improve the project or the analysis. The comments were also used in making or refining this decision. The EA contains a summary of other comments and concerns and how they were treated and used through this analysis. Documents summarizing the comments we received and how we dealt with those comments are available on the project website at <http://go.usa.gov/3FT5Y> (case sensitive) and in the Project Record.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The following is a summary of the project analysis to determine significance, as defined by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). “Significant” as used in NEPA requires consideration of both context and intensity of the expected project effects.

Context is the geographic, social, and environmental setting and timeframe within which the project may have effects. **Intensity** is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this EA and the references in the project record.

The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information, GIS analysis, and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b):

Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on the balance the effects will be beneficial. I have considered both the adverse and beneficial effects. Negative effects on resources such as the spread of invasive weeds and effects on aquatic habitat and fish species are expected to be negligible or minor if mitigation measures, best management practices, and design criteria are properly implemented. Similarly effects to historic resources and recreation resources will not be significant (see resource sections in the EA for more information). My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. The Selected Alternative will result in a healthier and safer recreational environment for visitors. With improvement of the trail and stream crossings, the selected alternative will increase user safety and make it easier for users to safely cross streams. The Selected Alternative will also provide users with safer routes around steep terrain and better trail signage for better navigation and safety (see Recreation section in the EA for more information).

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area because most unique lands, like parklands, farmlands, and wild and scenic rivers are not present, and design elements and mitigation measures will protect or mitigate effects to wetlands and historic resources. The Selected Alternative was designed to and will help preserve and restore the historical character and structures of the Treadwell Trail (see the Heritage and Soils/Wetlands sections of the EA for more information).

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial, because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The effects analysis shows the effects are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Additionally, my decision includes design elements, mitigation measures, and Best Management Practices to minimize potential negative resource effects and reduce risk.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the current action preserves the important historic elements of the Treadwell Ditch Trail. And while we are making attempts for continuity along the trail under Forest Service management through this project, this decision does not preclude different decisions in the future.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The cumulative impacts of this action are not significant. Cumulative impacts were considered in the EA. Based on known past, current, and reasonably foreseeable actions, cumulative effects are expected to be negligible or minor for all resources and opportunities (see Cumulative Effects sections in the EA). Monitoring of the trail will be necessary to ensure no significant cumulative effects to heritage resources occurs.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources. The Treadwell Ditch Trail was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Selected Alternative will not adversely affect historic properties. Design elements included in the Selected Alternative are intended to assure the integrity of this historic site, and to avoid impacts to the historic dams and other features at major crossings. The included construction of a short replica segment of ditch, as well as interpretive signage regarding the history of the trail, may increase interest in and concern for historic properties in general, and specifically those directly in the area of potential affect. The archeological review resulted in a determination of “no adverse effect” for the Proposed Action alternative. The Forest Service consulted with the Alaska State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO) on this project. SHPO concurred with this finding in a January 13, 2016 letter from Judith Bittner based on the Forest Service taking multiple precautions to ensure that historic properties will not be adversely impacted by the new construction. Additional consultation with SHPO occurred on the proposed changes in the EA and in the draft decision during the objection period. The Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with a finding of ‘no adverse effect’ for the Proposed Action on March 2, 2016.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act. The analysis concluded that no threatened or endangered species will be affected by the Selected Alternative (see the Wildlife section of the EA). Biological Evaluations for threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive species are available in the Project Record for this project.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. A Nationwide Permit for wetlands will be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the fill needed along the trail reroute.

Conclusion

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA and specialist reports, I have determined that the Selected Alternative will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act – The Selected Alternative is consistent with all Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and all proposed activities are allowable as described above under Semi-Remote Recreation Land Use Designation (LUD). The BMPs and design elements included in this decision will help to protect resources in the LUD. No Forest Plan amendment is required to meet the conditions set for this area.

Endangered Species Act – Biological evaluations were completed for threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive animal and plant species. No threatened and endangered animal or plant species will be affected by the Selected Alternative.

Bald Eagle Protection Act – Management activities within bald eagle habitat will be in accordance with the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Bald Eagle Management Plan. Bald eagles occur in the analysis area, but generally will not be in the vicinity of project work sites. If eagle nests are found, helicopter flights will avoid eagle nests during the breeding season per the USFWS Bald Eagle Management Guidelines.

ANILCA Section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding – No significant change in deer distribution or abundance is expected to result from implementing the Selected Alternative. Trail improvements may slightly improve access. The Selected Alternative is not expected to cause an increase in harvest of deer by non-rural residents over rural residents.

For these reasons, this alternative will not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other foods.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 – The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act includes locating, inventorying and nominating all cultural sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. This activity has been reviewed by a qualified archeologist and a determination has been made that the Selected Alternative will have no adverse effects to historic properties. Implementation of design features and monitoring in this EA will ensure that the project will have no adverse effect to properties eligible for inclusion on the National Register and that undocumented properties are not inadvertently disturbed. The construction of a short replica segment of ditch as well as interpretive signage regarding the history of the trail may increase interest in and concern for historic properties in general, and specifically those directly in the area of potential affect.

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990) – With implementation of design elements, this activity will not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988. Executive Order 11990 requires Federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands. The proposed activities will fill about 0.08 acres of wetland. The Forest Service will need to apply for an Army Corps of Engineers permit for filling in wetlands for the proposed activities.

Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice – Implementation of this project is not anticipated to cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effect to minority or low-income populations because the proposed activities are expected to benefit human health and are not expected to result in meaningful adverse environmental consequences.

Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species – Invasive species populations could be spread by implementing the Selected Alternative. However no invasive species are currently present, the likelihood of infestation under closed-canopy forest is low, and design elements and mitigation should greatly reduce the risk of introduction and spread of invasive species. An invasive plant risk assessment was completed for this project. Findings and recommendations are incorporated into this project design and decision.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – The Selected Alternative will have no effect on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). Project activities will avoid or minimize negative effects to EFH by implementing Forest Plan standards and guidelines and applicable Best Management Practices along with articles from the Alaska Administrative Code Regulations. Salmon downstream will not be affected due to the implementation of the Best Management Practices to reduce sedimentation.

Executive Order 75 (Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments) – The following federally recognized tribal governments and organizations were contacted via the scoping letter and briefed by the District Ranger during monthly coordination meetings:

- Douglas Indian Association
- Goldbelt Incorporated

No formal consultation has been requested and no tribal comments have been provided to this point.

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

This decision was subject to administrative review (objection) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218. Individuals who submitted specific, written comments during either the 30-day comment period or the February 2014 scoping period had standing to participate in the predecisional review and objection process.

After the draft decision and EA were made available to the public, a legal notice announcing the objection period for this project was published in the Juneau Empire, the newspaper of record on February 25, 2016. No objections were received during the objection period.

Implementation

Since no objections were received, the decision notice may be signed as soon as five (5) business days after the close of the objection filing period. Implementation may begin immediately after this decision notice is signed, pursuant to 36 CFR 218.12.

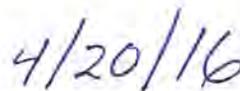
For further information concerning the Treadwell project, contact:

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907-789-6228
mdilger@fs.fed.us

Approved by:



BRAD ORR
Juneau District Ranger



Date

Figure A. Entire Treadwell Ditch Trail.



Treadwell Ditch Trail Bridges Construction DN and FONSI

Figure B. Reroute of failed berm above Eagle Creek.



Figure C. Second Reroute at Treadwell Gorge.

