# Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need

## The Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to develop a Revised Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan which will guide natural resource management activities on the Forest for the next 10 - 15 years and meet the objectives of federal law, regulation, and policy. The proposed action also includes adoption of a project-level, site-specific access management plan, which identifies access opportunities and restrictions for Forest roads and trails. The implementing regulations for the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) require that each Forest Supervisor develop a forest plan (36 CFR 219.1) and revise it at least every 10 - 15 years (36 CFR 219.10(g)). An environmental impact statement (EIS) documenting the environmental analysis for this revision is required by NFMA (36 CFR 219.10(b)). The 1984 Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1984 Forest Plan) and Final Environmental Impact Statement were completed on July 27, 1984 (USDA Forest Service 1984a, USDA Forest Service 1984b). The 1984 Forest Plan has been amended five times (USDA Forest Service 2000a).

## Planning Area

The planning area encompasses the entire 5.45-million acre Chugach National Forest located in Southcentral Alaska (see Figure 1-1). The Chugach is the second largest forest in the National Forest System and is subdivided into three administrative units: the Glacier, Seward, and Cordova Ranger Districts. One-third of the Chugach National Forest is rock and moving ice. The remainder is a diverse and majestic mixture of land, water, plants, and animals. Diversity is what makes the Chugach so unique. The mountains and water of the Kenai Peninsula, the islands and glaciers of Prince William Sound, and the wetlands and birds of the Copper River Delta make the Chugach a destination for adventurers the world over.

The planning area contains 96 watersheds that generally follow major drainage divides within three broad geographic areas: Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound and Copper River Delta. Communities located within the project area include Whittier, Hope, Seward, Cooper Landing, Moose Pass, Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, and Cordova, Alaska. Adjacent to the project area are the communities of Anchorage, Valdez, Sterling, Kenai, and Soldotna. The Chugach National Forest is bordered to the west, on the Kenai Peninsula, by the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and the Kenai Fjords National Park; to the north, near Girdwood, by the Chugach State Park; to the northeast, near the Copper River Delta, by the Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve and, to the east Bureau of Land Management lands.

## Need to Change and Rationale

Regulations implementing the NFMA (36 CFR 219) require the Regional Forester to make revisions to forest plans and provide the basis for proposed changes within the context of regulatory requirements. In 1997, the Regional Forester determined that the 1984 Forest Plan needed to be revised. This need for change was based on an assessment of current management direction, new information, new laws and policies, resource supply potentials and projections of demand, the results of monitoring and evaluation, and the identification of public issues and management concerns (USDA Forest Service 1998b).

### Multiple-use Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the 1984 Forest Plan were developed in 1984 and have not been updated. National forest management is dynamic, and changes in public views, resource uses and demands, and natural resource knowledge require periodic re-evaluation of multiple-use goals and objectives.

Inventory information concerning the Forest's land and water resources is more accurate than it was in 1984. The Forest now has a geographic information system (GIS), which greatly enhances the Forest Plan revision process by incorporating the most current information available on the Forest.

Scientific knowledge of physical and biological processes occurring on the Forest has improved in recent years. New or emerging knowledge and techniques in the areas of biological diversity, recreational trends, and public opinion polling make revision of the 1984 Forest Plan a timely matter.

### Management Prescriptions

The 1984 Forest Plan uses 22 broad analysis area designations to allocate land uses to different types of management (such as primitive recreation or emphasis on wildlife habitat). More specific management prescriptions have become the standard in more recent Forest Plans.

### Standards and Guidelines

Forest standards and guidelines specify how projects and activities are to be carried out to satisfy multiple resource needs. Several new issues, such as ecological sustainability, subsistence, natural quiet, and potential designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers, have emerged in the revision processes that were not addressed in the 1984 Forest Plan. Forest Plan revision provides an opportunity to add new standards and guidelines for these issues in addition to updating existing standards and guidelines.

### Timber

Under the 1984 Forest Plan, lands were made available for a variety of uses including timber production. The 1984 Forest Plan established an average allowable sale quantity (a decadal ceiling on the amount of timber that can be supplied) of 16.9 MMBF per year. This quantity was designed to meet projected market demands in Southcentral Alaska and to contribute to the economy while meeting multiple-use resource goals.

In the 1986 settlement agreement to the 1984 Forest Plan appeal, the allowable sale quantity was amended to 6.3 MMBF per year for the first 5 years and 10.6 MMBF per year for the remaining 5 years of the Forest Plan. The actual volume harvested during the last five years (1996-2000) averaged only 1.5 MMBF per year.

With market demand for Southcentral Alaska's timber expected to remain low during the net 10-15 years and in response to public issues, a reduction in the current allowable sale quantity needs to be considered since the amended 1984 Forest Plan allowable sale quantity objectives were not achieved.

**Public Issues**
Professional and public concern for the potential loss of species throughout the world is accelerating. Concerns also have mounted regarding the spruce bark beetle epidemic on the Kenai Peninsula, the management of roadless areas, and other issues. In addition, increasing levels and new types of recreational use on the Forest call for new management approaches to address issues of public access, conflicts between uses, and protection of the environment.

**New Laws and Policies**
Finally, newly created or changed laws and policies affect Forest Plan content and Forest management. Examples include the Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987, the 1987 Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Amendments of 1990.

After examining the 1984 Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor concluded that many of the existing Forestwide goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area prescriptions needed to be considered for change and, therefore, recommended to the Regional Forester that the 1984 Forest Plan be revised. A Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to revise the 1984 Forest Plan was published in the *Federal Register* on April 21,1997.

## Situation Statements (Significant Issues)

"Situation statements" represent where public "interests" are in conflict or where existing conditions could be improved by changing the 1984 Forest Plan. Situation statements identify major issues, concerns and interests that can be addressed through management area prescriptions. Management area prescriptions reflect different ways of managing land. Those issues, concerns and interests were developed from comments received during the scoping period.

Six situation statements were determined to be significant and are the focus of the Forest Plan revision. These situation statements are addressed through the proposed action and alternatives. Key indicators that were used to determine how well the alternatives respond to the situation statements were identified. Other resources were analyzed for change through adjustment of standards and guidelines or management area prescriptions.

Each situation statement has environmental, social and economic implications. Environmental implications relate to the fundamental integrity of the physical and

biological aspects of the Forest environment and surrounding area. Social implications relate to the people who use the Forest or whom Forest management directly affects. Economic implications relate to the people, businesses and government agencies that rely on the Forest for income or livelihood.

In each alternative, the situation statements are addressed in the context of ecosystem management. Ecosystem management is the tool that the Forest uses to address and integrate the environmental, social, and economic implications of these topics. Next, the situation statements, their associated environmental, social and economic implications, and the key indicators (measures) of how each topic will be addressed are discussed.

## 1. Ecological Systems Management

In 1992, the Chief of the Forest Service provided direction for the agency to implement the practice of ecosystem management. Its goal is to produce diverse, healthy, productive and sustainable ecosystems under an operating philosophy based on environmental sensitivity, social responsibility, economic feasibility and scientific principles. Maintaining biodiversity is a critical component of ecosystem management. Biological diversity (biodiversity) refers to "the full variety of life in an area, including the ecosystems, plant and animal communities, species and genes, and the processes through which individual organisms interact with one another and their environments" (USDA Forest Service 1992b).

Public scoping comments in 1997 indicated that some people think ecological conditions on the Forest have declined (e.g., spruce bark beetle epidemic, etc.) and that active management can restore sustainability by providing a greater diversity and balance of ecological types on the Forest. They suggest that management can bring back a green-forested appearance and forest diversity to the Kenai Peninsula. They are interested in a forest condition that can support forest products uses and recreation uses in the future along with associated employment opportunities.

Others think that sustaining ecosystems on the Forest can best be accomplished by allowing natural processes to operate without disruption by humans. These interests are in natural appearing landscapes, maintaining plant and animal populations (particularly brown bears) through preservation of habitat and maintaining the intrinsic value of natural evolving ecosystems. They also have interests in employment, but feel that maintaining ecosystems in natural conditions will provide the most sustainable employment opportunities.

The following are key indicators for Ecological Systems Management:

- changes in the regional landscape;
- changes in land cover, vegetative cover and forest structure;

- bioenvironmental classes (generalized climate, vegetation and landforms);
- wildlife species richness by prescription category; and,
- wildlife species richness by land cover class and habitats of interest.

## 2. Habitat for Fish and Wildlife

Fish and wildlife provide major subsistence, commercial, recreational, and traditional and cultural values on the Forest. Maintenance of the habitat supporting wildlife populations is a focal point for public, state and federal natural resource agencies, as well as user groups, Native organizations and individuals.

Some people feel active habitat enhancement projects such as fish ladders or prescribed burns are appropriate or even necessary for sustaining or improving fish and wildlife populations. Some feel that no active enhancement is necessary and natural processes should prevail. Others feel that other land management activities, such as timber harvest or road building, can be accomplished without harming fish and wildlife habitat or can be mitigated with enhancement projects.

Conservation of brown bears is a specific concern on the Kenai Peninsula. Some people feel that active management can take place on the Kenai Peninsula, with adequate mitigation, and still conserve brown bears. They think relying on natural processes to conserve brown bears unnecessarily restricts other Forest activities (e.g., timber harvest, recreation development, etc.).

Other people felt that allowing natural processes to operate without disruption by humans could best conserve brown bears. They are concerned that development such as timber harvest, roads and trails, and recreation use could detrimentally affect the conservation of brown bears.

The following are key indicators for Habitat for Fish:

- percentage of coho and pink salmon by prescription category;
- acres and miles of improved aquatic habitat; and,
- amount of disturbance by timber harvest.

The following are key indicators Habitat for Wildlife:

- habitat for management indicator species, species of special interest and threatened, endangered and sensitive species; and,
- distribution of wildlife habitat for management indicator species, species of special interest and threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

# 3. Resource Development

## Forest Products

Many people gather firewood from the Forest for heating and cooking. Others have built their homes from logs taken from the Forest. Still, other people collect berries and other plants for subsistence use in addition to moss, cones, conks, boughs, seedlings, saplings, and poles for a variety of other uses.

Historically, the Forest has sustained a commercial timber industry since the early 1900s when timber was harvested for mining timbers, firewood, and home construction, followed by railroad ties during construction of the Alaska Railroad. Today, a small commercial industry exists which over the last five years has harvested an average of 1.5 million board feet per year, mostly on the Kenai Peninsula.

People expressed an interest in obtaining a variety of forest products for uses ranging from personal use to creating business opportunities, employment, community stability and maintaining traditional lifestyles in resource production occupations. Some people would like to see the Forest make more timber for commercial forest products available while others only saw a need to supply personal use forest products. Still, others would like to see no use of products from the Forest.

The following are key indicators for Forest Products:

**Suitable Timberlands Scheduled for Chargeable Timber Harvest**

- estimated average annual demand for commercial forest products;
- acres of suitable timberlands allocated for timber production by prescription category and management area prescription; and,
- annual allowable sale quantity from suitable timberlands (chargeable board/cubic foot volume of sawtimber and utility volume).

**Unsuitable Forestland Planned for Nonchargeable Timber Harvest**

- estimated average annual demand for personal and free use forest products;
- annual acres of unsuitable forestland planned for vegetation management by small commercial, personal and /or free use timber harvest; and,
- annual total board/cubic foot volume of nonchargeable forest products (sawtimber, poles, cabin logs, firewood) available for small commercial, personal, and/or free use.

## Minerals

Historically, mining is one of the oldest commercial uses of the Forest. Today, most of the Forest is available for mineral exploration and mining unless specifically precluded by an act of Congress or other withdrawal.

The exploration and production of locatable, leasable, and saleable minerals on the Forest is important to many people. Some people expressed an interest in not allowing any mining or minerals development on the Forest while others prefer to not allow any new mining claims on the Forest while recognizing existing claims. Other people would like to see more areas withdrawn from mineral entry, while others would like to see more opportunities on the Forest for recreational gold panning. Finally, some people expressed a desire to see all areas of potential mineralization left open for exploration and possible development.

The following are key indicators for Minerals:

- acres open to locatable mineral entry;
- past and current mining claims;
- active mining operations;
- active mineral material sites;
- acres available for oil and gas leasing; and,
- reasonably foreseeable development for oil and gas production.

# 4. Recreation and Tourism

Recreation and tourism is how people directly experience the spectacular natural scenery of the Chugach National Forest. Rugged mountain ranges with slopes and glaciers that tumble to the sea; fish runs so abundant that any angler can catch a big one; watchable wildlife such as brown bears, moose, bald eagles, whales, and sea otters; seabird concentrations that may be unrivaled anywhere else north of the Everglades; and old growth temperate rainforest scattered on a string of islands and coastal lands--all make the Chugach National Forest an outstanding recreational setting.

Yet the very features that make the Chugach National Forest so outstanding may also limit recreational opportunities. Much of the Forest is covered with steep mountains, glaciers, icefields, or icy-cold saltwater. People must have well-developed outdoor adventure skills such as backcountry skiing, sea kayaking, and mountaineering, or use modern technology such as snowmachines, helicopters, and motorized boats to access this rugged, remote, and often unforgiving terrain. Frequently a combination of both approaches is needed to fully enjoy the Chugach National Forest.

As a result, “mainstream” recreational opportunities on the Chugach National Forest are concentrated along the few road corridors and accessible shorelines

that people can easily reach. Crowding and some conflicts among recreationists are increasing in such areas. Recreation and tourism is projected to increase in Southcentral Alaska due to overall population growth. Patterns of recreation may also change over time due to changes in demographics, such as the aging of the U.S. population, and changes in access, such as construction of road access to Whittier. Balancing projected demand, the desires of different user groups, and the land's capacity is the central dilemma --how do we continue providing high quality recreation opportunities in a way that conserves the Forest's unique natural landscape for future generations?

### Recreation Settings

The goal of most recreationists, whether resident or visitor, is to have a positive experience by engaging in outdoor recreation activities. Forest managers cannot provide recreation experiences, but they can provide the settings for these experiences to be realized. Recreation settings in this context are the physical places in which a variety of recreation activities occur. Participating in activities in appropriate settings creates a user's recreation experience and consequent level of satisfaction. Matching one's desired experience with a setting that can allow the realization of that experience is the key to a satisfactory, positive recreation experience. The Chugach National Forest provides a variety of recreation settings, from primitive to highly developed, in a complex diversity of landscapes. This continuum of settings is described by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

### Key Indicators for Recreation Settings

- Difference among existing and proposed Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes, by alternative;
- Comparison of relative distribution of ROS classes, among alternatives.

### Recreation Use

Recreation use is a measure of the number of people participating in a given activity or using a given site. Recreation occurs at constructed, developed sites or in the general forest area, sometimes called dispersed areas or the backcountry. As part of the analysis of recreation supply and demand, use levels are projected into the future to provide an estimate of demand. Currently, the demand for campgrounds and cabins exceed the available capacity. Future demand can then be compared to each alternative's proposed recreation capacity or supply in developed infrastructure (roads, trails, campgrounds, and other facilities) as well as in dispersed areas.

**Key Indicators for Accommodating Recreation Use**

- Comparison among existing developed infrastructure and capacity and the alternatives' proposed developed infrastructure and capacity;
- Comparison among existing dispersed recreation capacity and the alternatives' proposed dispersed recreation capacity.

**User Group Conflicts**

Because the terrain and the infrastructure on the Chugach National Forest concentrate people on to a relatively small part of the overall land base, conflicts among different user groups have developed over the issue of access to desirable recreation settings. This issue is most intense on the Kenai Peninsula, which is within an hour's drive of half of Alaska's population and hosts two-thirds of all visitors to Alaska. The Kenai also has the most developed road, trail, and facility infrastructure, compared to Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta. Conflicts over access are focused on:

- Motorized and nonmotorized recreation in the winter and summer, including snow machining, heli-skiing, cross-country skiing, and natural quiet;
- Need for additional recreation access in both winter and summer.

**Key Indicators for Responding to User Group Conflicts**

- Comparison of strategies used by alternatives to respond to user group conflicts, in each geographic area (Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, Copper River Delta).

## 5. Recommendations for Administrative and Congressional Designations

Public interest in special designations, such as Research Natural Areas (RNAs), Wilderness, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, is strong and passionate. There is disagreement over the interpretation of the Alaska National Interest Lands and Conservation Act (ANILCA). Some feel that there are already enough conservation system units in Alaska and that additions would violate the intent of ANILCA. Some feel that ANILCA does not limit or restrict further study or recommendation of a conservation system unit. Others expressed an interest in protecting ecosystems through special administrative (Forest Service) action and congressional designations (law). These designations are viewed as providing long-term protection to ecosystems and providing primitive recreation opportunities. Still others expressed concern that any designations could exclude resource development, affect existing uses, and limit access and private property rights.

The following are key indicators for recommendations for administrative and congressional designations:

- acres recommended for Wilderness designation;
- number and miles of rivers recommended for Wild and Scenic Rivers designation; and,
- number and acres of proposed and existing RNAs.

## 6. Subsistence

ANILCA requires the Forest Service to consider the effect of any management activities on subsistence. Subsistence is an important part of the rural Alaskan lifestyle. People in the rural communities of Chenega Bay, Cordova, Tatitlek, Whittier, Hope, and Cooper Landing, and others outside the Forest partake in a variety of subsistence activities on the Forest. Subsistence can provide cultural, spiritual, personal, and sustenance value. People typically take fish, wildlife and plant material for subsistence. Traditional native values and beliefs are centered on their relationship with the animals and plants in the world around them. Natives remain socially, economically, and spiritually intertwined with their subsistence heritage.

People have indicated that maintaining subsistence opportunities is important. They are concerned that activities such as timber harvest, road building, and recreation development could impact fish and wildlife populations or increase competition for subsistence resources. They are concerned about maintaining traditional access to subsistence resources and are concerned about special designations that may limit their access. They are also concerned about fishing and hunting competition with urban users and about displacement from use areas because of conflicts with non-consumptive users.

The following are key indicators for Subsistence:

- habitat capacity and management intensity that would affect species important to subsistence;
- acres of habitat where traditional access is not limited;
- miles of new road construction; and,
- number of backcountry sites.

## Other Issues and Concerns

Some interests did not meet the criteria for being considered significant, but were nevertheless analyzed for changes through adjustment of standards and guidelines, management area prescriptions, or procedural adjustments and appear in the Revised Forest Plan. Examples include the topics of air, water, and soil resources, landownership and special uses.

A number of other interests and issues raised by the public and other agencies are not addressed in alternatives or situation statements. These interests may

require a solution that is outside the scope of the Forest Plan. If the topic is not resolvable under one of those decisions, it is better handled in another process. Other topics are best handled legislatively, by other responsible agencies, or as a result of further research.

## Decisions to Be Made

### Forest Plan

Based on the environmental analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Revised Forest Plan, the Regional Forester will decide to approve or disapprove adoption of the Revised Forest Plan in accordance with 36 CFR 219.10. The adoption of a forest plan establishes key decisions for the long-term management of a national forest. These decisions are:

1. Forestwide multiple-use goals and objectives, including a description of the desired condition of the Chugach National Forest;
2. Forestwide standards and guidelines;
3. Management areas and management area prescriptions;
4. Identifying lands administratively available for oil and gas leasing and the stipulations that must be applied to specific lease areas and lands the Bureau of Land Management is authorized to lease;
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements for implementation of the Revised Forest Plan;
6. Identifying land suitable for timber and establishing timber harvest levels from suitable timberlands;
7. Recommending areas for Wilderness classification; and,
8. Identifying rivers eligible for Wild and Scenic River consideration and recommendation of suitable rivers for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System.
9. Identifying lands open or closed to motorized vehicles.
10. Identifying the methods of public access allowed/restricted on Forest Service roads, trails and routes.

## The Planning, Environmental Analysis and Decision Process

National forest planning takes place at several levels: national, regional, forest, and project levels. The Revised Forest Plan FEIS is a forest-level analysis and its scope is confined to addressing the situation statements and possible environmental consequences of the plan. It does not attempt to address decisions made at higher levels, such as by the Chief of the Forest Service. It does, however, implement direction provided at those higher levels.

“Tiering” is the process under NEPA of relying on programmatic or “higher level” environmental analyses for the treatment of general matters and focusing on

more specific matters in the subsequent analysis. Environmental analyses for projects will in turn, tier to this, Revised Chugach Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS.

Copies of this FEIS and Revised Forest Plan may be obtained from the Forest Supervisor's Office in Anchorage, Alaska, the Forest's internet web site (www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/revision/index.htm) or on CD-ROM.

Additional documentation available to the public, including more detailed analyses of area resources, may be found in the planning record located at the Forest Supervisor's Office, 3301 C Street, Suite 300, Anchorage, Alaska, 99503-3998. Documents such as the 1984 Chugach National Forest Plan, the Analysis of the Management Situation, the Revised Forest Plan, and FEIS are available at public libraries throughout Southcentral Alaska, as well as at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Anchorage, Alaska.

## Consultation Process

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that the public be offered opportunities to participate in the development, review, and revision of land management plans. Similarly, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires identification and disclosure of the environmental effects of agency proposals and provides for public review and comment.

The Chugach used an open participatory approach to forest plan revision that is called collaborative learning. All interdisciplinary team meetings and revision related forest leadership team meetings were open to the public. At key points during the planning process additional consultation meetings were conducted with representatives of other state and federal agencies and Native Alaskan tribes. Typically these meetings were conducted just prior to the public release of draft and final planning documents to the general public. Agencies and tribes were given an opportunity to review our current planning direction and offer suggestions of changes that would make it more compatible with the management strategies on their lands. The Planning Team also worked closely with major landowners, primarily native corporations, with interests in the vicinity of the Chugach National Forest.

The purpose of the consultation meetings was to encourage dialogue between agencies, tribes and major landowners to promote coordination of various land management strategies and to integrate scientific and agency knowledge about problem situations in a systematic fashion.

Some agencies and landowners assigned one or more of their staff to attend all planning team meetings and work sessions as necessary to coordinate their land management strategies with the direction in the Revised Forest Plan. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assigned representatives to attend almost all planning team meetings. Other agencies and tribes were involved at key points during the planning process when necessary to coordinate their interests with current Forest Plan revision proposals.

Written summaries of land management strategies were provided to the Forest Service by:

1. Chugach Alaska Corporation
2. Chenega Corporation
3. Eyak Corporation
4. Tatitlek Corporation
5. State of Alaska

Recognizing that only the Forest Service has the authority to make the final decision, agencies, tribes and landowners were encouraged to be involved in all phases of the planning and decision making process to seek consensus. Although consensus was not achieves with all cases our consultation efforts resulted in increased rapport, respect and trust among agencies, tribes and landowners.

Newsletters, a Revision Website, telephone recordings and collaborative workshops were also used to keep the public informed on the Chugach National Forest Plan revision process.