

South 12-Mile LTF Reconstruction and East 12-Mile LTF Removal Environmental Assessment

**USDA Forest Service
Tongass National Forest
Craig Ranger District
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Purpose and Need

Introduction

The Tongass National Forest, Craig Ranger District, USDA Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. It also provides the supporting information for a determination to prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Two log transfer facilities (LTF) currently exist on the shore of Twelvemile Arm, on Prince of Wales Island:

- The East 12-Mile LTF is currently under permit and was constructed as an A-frame log handling system, mounted on a log bulkhead that cannot be used in its current condition because the lower level bulkhead logs are deteriorating.
- The South 12-Mile LTF consists of a log bulkhead without an A-frame and hasn't been used for more than 15 years.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, can be found in the project planning record located at the Craig Ranger District Office, Tongass National Forest in Craig, Alaska.

Proposed Action

The USDA Forest Service is proposing the reconstruction of an existing Log Transfer Facility (LTF) at the head of Twelvemile Arm (South 12-Mile LTF). The

reconstructed LTF would consist of a 2-level combination concrete base and log bulkhead and an equipment off-load ramp designed as a low-angle ramp to also serve as a recreational boat ramp. All reconstruction activities would be confined to the existing disturbed area of the South 12-Mile LTF area. The reconstructed LTF would be operated as a barge only facility. No logs would be placed directly into the water. The East 12-Mile LTF bulkhead and A-frame would be removed.

A contract would be issued for the reconstruction of the South 12-Mile LTF and the removal of the East 12-Mile LTF. The project is planned for the 2005 construction season. All permits required by the Corp of Engineers and the State of Alaska would be obtained before construction activities begin.



Bulkhead Log at the South 12-Mile LTF

The project area is located along Forest Road 2120050 on Prince of Wales Island, within the Craig Ranger District, Tongass National Forest, Alaska (see map). The project area is located in Value Comparison Unit (VCU) 621.

Need for the Proposal

The Tongass National Forest has received special appropriations to repair and maintain LTFs. The South 12-Mile site was selected because of a lack of functioning LTFs on the east side of Prince of Wales Island and a lack of equipment off-loading facilities. Incorporating a ramp into the redesign of the

South 12-Mile LTF would provide a wider opportunity for off-loading equipment at various tide stages and also serve as a recreational boat ramp. The nearest boat ramp is in Hollis, almost 10 air miles away. The existing East 12-Mile LTF was selected for removal because the lowest tier of logs has deteriorated and the structure is currently unsafe to use.

Existing Condition

Two LTFs currently exist on the shore of Twelvemile Arm. The East 12-Mile LTF was constructed as a log bulkhead with an A-frame log handling system, but cannot be used in its current condition because the lower level bulkhead logs are deteriorating. This site was considered for upgrading but it lacks an adequate log storage area, and surrounding rock ledges limit the potential for expansion. The South 12-Mile LTF was constructed as a bulkhead without an additional A-frame log handling system. This LTF has not been used for more that 15 years. The South 12-Mile is preferred over the East 12-Mile LTF because of the extra room for storing logs before loading them on barges.

Current timber sales that might use an upgraded LTF include:

- Units from the Fusion Timber Sale, included in the Polk Inlet EIS
- Units from the Soda Nick EA, currently being analyzed
- Small salvage sales

Current recreation use of the area is limited to minor amounts of dispersed recreation including hunting and camping on the land, with fishing and crabbing occurring in the ocean. Recreational use of the area is expected to increase in the future as a result of improved ferry service to Prince of Wales Island.

Decision Framework

The Craig District Ranger will decide whether or not to implement the project in accordance with the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The three decision points that will be addressed are:

1. The location, design and scheduling of reconstruction activities
2. Access management measures (road restrictions and closures)
3. Project-specific mitigation measures and monitoring

The proposed South 12-Mile LTF Reconstruction project responds to the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan includes forest-wide goals and objectives, area-specific (land use designation) goals, objectives and desired future conditions. The project would help move the Twelvemile Arm area toward desired conditions outlined in the Forest Plan.

Agencies/Persons Consulted

This project has been discussed with Mark Minnillo, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Craig, Alaska who visited the site with a USDA Forest Service Interdisciplinary team on January 16, 2004 to help identify issues and concerns. Mr. Minnillo was supportive of the 12-Mile LTF being designed for

direct barge loading of logs instead of storing logs in the water. He was concerned about building a ramp that could be used for placing bundles of logs directly in the water.

Drew Grant, Alaska Department of Environmental Coordination ADEC) was contacted regarding Impaired Waterbody listings. Twelvemile Arm is listed on the State 303(d) List of Impaired Waterbodies. Storing logs in the water, during the 1970s caused impacts to the area over and above permitted impacts (1 acre of contiguous bark overage and/or 10 cm depth of bark accumulation). Storing logs in the water at or near the South LTF site would not be permitted due to impacts on fish habitat caused by bark on the ocean floor. Only direct barge loading of logs would be permitted at the 12-Mile South LTF.

Dennis Stone of the Army Corp of Engineers was contacted to determine public notification and permit requirements.

Public Involvement

This project will be listed in the Tongass National Forest Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions. This EA will be sent to the necessary regulatory agencies, forest product companies and environmental groups that may have an interest in this project.

Issues

Issues identified during scoping are discussed below.

1. Fisheries and Water Quality-Essential Fish Habitat

A concern exists about potential impacts to eelgrass beds in Twelvemile Arm. The South 12-Mile LTF site was originally designed to place logs in the water before towing them to market. In the early 1990s a permit to store logs in Twelvemile Arm was denied because of extensive eelgrass beds. Wave action causes bark to slough off logs and settle to the bottom when logs are stored in water. Bark accumulates and eventually buries the eelgrass beds, eliminating them. East 12-Mile LTF was constructed to move log storage away from eelgrass beds.

2. Increased Competition for Subsistence Use Resources

A concern exists that hunting and fishing use of the area would increase with the construction of a boat ramp. This could lead to a restriction of subsistence use resources.

3. Mitigation Measures

Only direct loading of logs to barges would be approved from the 12-Mile South LTF to insure that eelgrass beds and marine species would not be negatively impacted. Placing log bundles or storing logs in the water around the 12-Mile South LTF would not be allowed.

Alternatives

This section provides a detailed description of the Proposed Action and alternative methods for achieving the project's Purpose and Need Statement. The alternatives were developed based on issues that could not be resolved with the Proposed Action. All alternatives are consistent with the Forest Plan. All applicable standards and guidelines, and Best Management Practices (BMP) have been incorporated in the design of these alternatives. Many measures are used in the planning and design of alternatives to prevent adverse impacts. Additional direction comes from the applicable USDA Forest Service manuals and handbooks.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1 (No Action)

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires analysis of a no-action alternative. No reconstruction would take place at this time. The South 12-Mile LTF would remain in its current state. An off-load ramp would not be constructed for equipment or recreational boating use. The East 12-Mile LTF would not be removed and would remain a safety hazard and an environmental concern.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

The proposed action for the 12-Mile LTF Reconstruction Project is to reconstruct the South 12-Mile LTF and remove the East 12-Mile LTF. The reconstructed LTF would consist of a 2-level combination concrete base and log bulkhead. The installation of a low-angle equipment off-load ramp would also be included in the project. This ramp could also serve as a recreational boat ramp. All reconstruction activities would be confined to the existing disturbed area of the LTF. This area includes the fill area. The South 12-Mile LTF reconstruction work and the East 12-Mile removal work would be planned for the 2005 construction season.

Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

The following alternative was considered during the planning process and has been eliminated from further study.

Reconstruct the existing 12-Mile LTF

The East 12-Mile site was developed as an A-frame facility. Logs were removed directly from logging trucks and placed into the water at Twelvemile arm for storage until they were rafted to a mill. This alternative was eliminated from consideration for reconstruction because the site was developed at a time when the Ketchikan Pulp Mill preferred to have logs rafted to them. The preferred method of delivery has changed. Sawmill operators currently prefer to have the logs shipped on barges. The East 12-

Mile LTF has very limited space for storing logs. The cost would be prohibitive to expand the site due to the steep terrain in the area.

Environmental Consequences

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

Direct environmental effects are those occurring at the same time and place as the initial cause or action. Indirect effects are those that occur later in time or are spatially removed from the activity, but would be significant in the foreseeable future. Cumulative effects result from incremental effects of actions, when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time.

Effects on Fisheries and Water Quality-Essential Fish Habitat

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (the Act) defines Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as “those waters and substrates necessary for fish spawning, breeding feeding, or growth to maturity”. “Fish” refers to federally managed saltwater fish or shellfish species and their prey; and freshwater bodies of water that are accessible to salmon.

Section 305(b)(2) of the Act states that all federal agencies must consult the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) when actions or proposed actions may adversely affect EFH. This Environmental Assessment (EA) satisfies the consultation requirements by providing: 1) a description of the proposed action; 2) an analysis of individual and cumulative effects of the action on EFH; 3) the USDA Forest Service’s views regarding effects on EFH; and 4) a discussion of proposed mitigation, if applicable.

The Twelvemile Arm is approximately 60-feet deep at its mouth. Depth in the middle of the arm ranges between 30 and 60 feet, measured at mean lower tide. The head of the arm has depths ranging from 5 to 30 feet. At least twenty Class I streams drain into Twelvemile Arm. Several spawning and rearing streams with abundant populations of salmon flow into Twelvemile Arm near the South LTF project area.

Twelvemile Arm, near the South 12-Mile LTF has good tidal action, which partially flushes submerged bark accumulation. The substrate near the South 12-Mile LTF is a mixture of sand, gravel, and shells. Schools of salmon fry, Dungeness crab, kelp, green sea urchin, kelp crab, clams, eelgrass, sea anemones, shrimp, gumboots, sea cucumbers, and starfish are present near the LTF. NMFS has identified the Twelvemile Arm as EFH for adult

arrowtooth flounder, yelloweye rockfish, dusky rockfish, and Pacific Ocean perch.

An underwater dive must be completed before Corp. of Engineer permits can be issued because the LTF has not been in operation for more than 15 years.

USDA Forest Service Position

The potential effects of the South 12-Mile LTF project on marine EFH include diminished habitat for managed species and their prey due to the placement of shot rock fill and prop wash action from boats and barges using the facility. The reconstruction and use of the South 12-Mile Arm LTF may have an adverse affect on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The removal of the East 12-Mile LTF may cause sediments to enter the water causing short-term impact. The effects on EFH would be minimized by following standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan; by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs); and by ensuring that other mitigation measures are in place. Effects would be minimized by:

- Reconstructing the South 12-Mile Arm LTF to comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination system (NPDES) permit requirements requiring discharge accumulation that does not exceed 1 acre
- Storing logs out of the water
- Not using the LTF to store float equipment
- Designing the LTF to minimize shading of eelgrass beds
- Not placing the boat ramp on or adjacent to eelgrass beds

The USDA Forest Service believes that these state-of-the art mitigation measures would avoid or minimize the effects of this proposed action on Essential Fish Habitat. Impacts to EFH are likely to occur only from unforeseen events.

A copy of the Environmental Assessment will be given to the National Marine Fisheries Service and the USDA Forest Service will continue the consultation process as stated in the agreement.

Effect on Subsistence Use Resources

The direct effect on subsistence use resources is expected to be very small. A temporary displacement of deer, ducks, geese, mink, otter, and to a lesser degree fish during reconstruction activities at the site may occur. All reconstruction activities would be restricted to existing disturbed areas and no direct effect to the habitat of subsistence use resources is anticipated.

An indirect effect on subsistence use resources caused by barge loading activities on the LTF site may occur. This may temporarily displace deer, ducks, geese, mink, otter, and to a lesser degree fish. Another potential indirect effect could be an increase in hunting and fishing in the area after

construction of the boat ramp. It is anticipated that most of the users of the boat ramp would be qualified subsistence users because most of the non-rural residents that come to Prince of Wales Island do not bring a boat. The use of subsistence resources in this area would be redistributed rather than increased and should not lead to additional restrictions.

No cumulative effects on subsistence use resources are anticipated.

Applicable Laws and Executive Orders

Applicable laws and executive orders apply to Federal Land Management projects and activities and are found in the planning record.

National Forest Management Act – All project alternatives fully comply with the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This project incorporates all applicable Forest Plan forest-wide standards and guidelines and management area prescriptions as they apply to the project area, and complies with Forest Plan goals and objectives. All require interagency review and coordination has been accomplished. New or revised measures resulting from this review have been incorporated.

The 1997 Forest Plan complies with all resource integration and management requirements of 36 CFR 219 (219.14 through 219.27). Application of Forest Plan direction for this project ensures compliance at the project level.

Endangered Species Act – A Biological Evaluation has been completed for this project and indicates that no federally listed threatened or endangered species would be affected by this activity.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) – Cultural resource surveys of planned roads, log transfer facilities, and harvest units on the east shore of Twelvemile Arm were conducted during previous harvest activities. No historic or archaeological sites were located on the east shore of Twelvemile Arm. Recommendations of “no effect” were reviewed by the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and concurrence received. Since the current LTF reconstruction does not expand the footprint of the existing South 12-Mile LTF the project results in no new ground disturbance and is not considered an undertaking for the purposes of NHPA, Section 106. The removal of the East 12-Mile LTF will also result in no new ground disturbance. A brief project summary and recommendations will be included in Region 10’s annual report to SHPO under terms of our most recent programmatic agreement (USDA Forest Service, 2002, # 02MU-111001-076).

Federal Cave Resource Protection Act – No known caves exist in the project area. No caves would be directly or indirectly affected by project activities.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) – The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. Due to the limited scope of this project, no significant restrictions on the abundance and distribution of, access to, or competition for subsistence resources in the project area are anticipated. The subsistence analysis indicates that the proposed actions would not present a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence uses or resources.

Clean Water Act – The Clean Water Act of 1972 as amended was intended to protect and improve the quality of water resources and maintain their beneficial uses. Section 313 of the Clean Water Act and executive Order 12580 of January 23, 1987, address Federal agency compliance and consistency, with water pollution control mandates.

The National Nonpoint Source Policy (December 12, 1984), the Forest Service Nonpoint Strategy (January 29, 1985) and the USDA Nonpoint Source Water Quality Policy (December 5, 1986) provide a protection and improvement emphasis for soil and water resources and water-related beneficial uses. Soil and water conservation practices were recognized as the primary control mechanisms for nonpoint, source pollution on National Forest System lands. The Environmental Protection Agency supports this perspective in their guidance, “Nonpoint Source Controls and Water Quality Standards” (August 19, 1987).

The USDA Forest Service must apply Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations to achieve Alaska Water Quality Standards. The site-specific application of BMPs, with a monitoring and feedback mechanism, is the approved strategy for controlling nonpoint source pollution as defined by Alaska’s Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Strategy (October 1996) as consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations. This Handbook is incorporated into the Forest Plan.

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act allows a silvicultural exemption from permitting requirements associated with discharge of dredge or fill material in waters of the United States, including wetlands. Silvicultural operations including timber harvest and roads generally qualify for this exemption if they are constructed and maintained in accordance with Best Management Practices specified in 33 CFR 323.4(a). These specific BMPs have been incorporated into the USDA Forest Service’s Soil and Water Conservation Handbook under BMP 12.5.

Clean Air Act – Emissions anticipated from the implementation of any project alternative would be of short duration and are not expected to exceed State of Alaska ambient air quality standards (18 AAC 50).

Coastal Zone Management Act – Under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972, as amended, USDA Forest Service activities and development projects that affect the coastal zone must be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP). Such “consistency determinations” are made by the USDA Forest Service, and are reviewed by the State of Alaska as required by the CZMA.

Under the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AFRPA) of 1979 (as amended), USDA Forest Service timber harvest projects satisfy the CZMA consistency requirements if the Forest Plan and all related standards and guidelines applicable to the project provide no less resource protection than the AFRPA requires for timber harvest projects on State land, except that the AFRPA specifies a different minimum riparian standard for Federal projects than for State projects.

Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP) – The USDA Forest Service has determined that the 12-Mile LTF reconstruction and removal project would affect the coastal zone and would be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP). That determination and supporting information would be provided to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of Project Management and Permitting. The State will review the project and determine if they agree with the USDA Forest Service determination. This facility is consistent with land uses in the Prince of Wales Island Area Plan (Alaska DNR, revised in 1998).

Floodplain Management, Executive Order 11988; Protection of Wetlands, Executive Order 11990 – The 12-Mile LTF reconstruction and removal project would not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and would not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990.

Executive Order 12898- Implementation of any project alternative is not anticipated to cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations.

Executive Order 12962 – This project is consistent with Executive Order 12962, in that it does not affect the quality, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of the United States aquatic resources for recreational fishing opportunities. The project would have a beneficial effect on fishing by providing easier boat access to Twelvemile Arm.

Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 – This project is consistent with the Marine Mammal Protection Act. No known marine mammal haul-out areas exist in the vicinity of the LTF.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as Amended in 1936 and 1972 – The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on any migratory bird species. No migratory bird species would be affected by this activity.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996
An Essential Fish Habitat effects analysis has been completed for this project. The Craig Ranger District Fisheries Biologist has determined that the 12-Mile LTF project may affect Essential Fish Habitat. The effects on EFH would be minimized by following standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan, by implementing Best Management Practices and by ensuring that mitigation measures are in place. All construction and removal activities would occur on previously disturbed areas. All logs shipped from this LTF would be loaded directly on barges. No log bundles would be placed in or stored in the water.

Federal and State Permits, Licenses, and Certifications

Various permits, licenses and certifications must be obtained from Federal and State agencies to proceed with this project. All require permits would be obtained before construction activities occur. The following permits would need to be obtained.

U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers

- Approval of discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended)
- Approval of construction of structures or work in navigable waters of the United States (Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act 1899)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

- Storm Water Discharge Permit
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System review (Section 402 of the Clean Water Act)

State of Alaska, Coordinating Agencies

- Authorization for Occupancy and Use of Tidelands and Submerged Lands
- Certification of Compliance with Alaska Water Quality Standards (Section 401 Certification)
- Solid Waste Disposal Permit (Section 402 of the Clean Water Act)

Planning Record

The planning record is located at the Craig Ranger District office in Craig, Alaska and will be available upon completion of this EA. The Tongass Land Management Plan (Forest Plan) is available at public libraries around the region, and at the Supervisor's Office in Ketchikan. The Forest Plan is also available in CD-ROM format and on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass>.

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