Draft Record of Decision

Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan

Kenai Peninsula Borough, Valdez-Cordova Census Area, and Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska
Chugach National Forest photo captions (clockwise from upper left):
Snowmachiner, Johnson Pass
Sockeye salmon, Placer River drainage
Portage Glacier, Kenai Peninsula
Whitewater rafting, Six Mile Creek
Brown bear, Kenai River
Alaska Railroad’s Glacier Discovery Train, Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop

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Draft Record of Decision for the Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan

Kenai Peninsula Borough, Valdez-Cordova Census Area, and Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska

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Introduction

This draft record of decision documents my decision and rationale for approval of the 2019 Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan (2019 land management plan) and selection of an alternative from the Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement. The 2019 land management plan and the selected alternative combined—hereafter called the final land management plan—will provide management direction for 5.4 million acres of National Forest System lands in southcentral Alaska for approximately the next 15 years. My decision is informed by the Forest Plan Assessment\(^1\) and input from State of Alaska and local government stakeholders, other federal agencies, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and members of the public.

This draft decision is consistent with the Forest Service’s 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (2012 Planning Rule) (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 219) and advances goals of the Department of Agriculture, including promoting local economic development and sound land stewardship in partnership with communities. In making my preliminary decision to select modified Alternative C (Selected Alternative), I am following the pre-decisional administrative review process (objection process) as described in Subpart B of 36 CFR 219. A final record of decision will be issued following the objection process. The projected outputs and rates of implementation are dependent on the annual budget process and other factors.

Forest Setting

The Chugach National Forest is characterized by extensive coastal shorelines; rugged mountains; spectacular snow and ice covered peaks; expansive glaciers; countless lakes, rivers, and streams; and unparalleled scenery, much of which is far from roads or trails. Over half the population of Alaska lives near the Chugach National Forest, with a portion of the national forest accessible within a day’s drive of Anchorage. The Chugach National Forest boundary is adjacent to lands managed by National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska State Parks, and State of Alaska. The national forest boundary also adjoins lands owned by Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and other private landowners.

The Chugach National Forest contributes significantly to the socioeconomic sustainability of southcentral Alaska. The national forest supports approximately 3,100 jobs tied to the commercial salmon harvest, valued at more than $19 million per year, and an additional estimated 1,000 jobs tied to recreational activities, including sportfishing. Recreation use on the Chugach National Forest provides an annual contribution of $12.3 million to the State of Alaska. Visitors come from all over the world to experience the numerous recreation opportunities the national forest offers, such as viewing mountainous glacial scenery and abundant wildlife, participating in sportfishing in rivers and lakes, kayaking, rafting, hiking, heli-skiing, hunting, horseback riding, and camping.

The Chugach National Forest is central to the lives of many Alaska residents and provides significant economic and traditional use contributions including commercial salmon fishing; employment in the recreation sector; drinking water; hydropower; and subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering activities.

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Six rural communities within the Chugach National Forest boundary harvest an average of 203 pounds per capita per year of edible wild renewable resources. The Chugach National Forest supplies approximately 1,000 cords annually of fuelwood for local communities and has issued over 370 authorizations for uses and activities.

The Chugach National Forest has largely intact ecosystems and significant capacity for resilience. Inventoried roadless areas comprise 99 percent of the national forest and are managed to allow natural processes to shape the landscape. Culturally important resources for subsistence and traditional uses are derived from healthy watersheds and clean water and contribute substantially to social well-being and economic sustainability in southcentral Alaska. The Chugach National Forest supports all five species of Pacific salmon, as well as other fish and wildlife species, which provide local economic benefits through fishing and hunting.

Thirteen federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes live within or near the Chugach National Forest, many if not all identifying the forest as their ancestral home. While there is diversity and distinction among these Tribes, they all have deep-rooted connections to the lands and waters of the national forest. The Chugach National Forest contributes to Alaska Native people’s way of life—through food and materials for daily use and artistic expression, spirituality, health care, family, and tribal history. Further, Alaska Native people see the Chugach National Forest as central to their being; they value and respect the forest with their culture and traditions, and they receive animals, fish, and plants from the forest for their health and well-being.

Needs for Change

The National Forest Management Act directs the development, amendment, and revision of land management plans to provide for the multiple use and sustained yield of the products and services on Forest Service lands, including outdoor recreation, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1604(e)). The 2012 Planning Rule guides this revision using a collaborative and science-based approach to promote the economic, social, and ecological sustainability of national forests and grasslands and other administrative units of the National Forest System.

Since the 2002 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest (2002 land management plan revision) was completed, there have been changes in ecological, social, and economic conditions on the Chugach National Forest, as well as changes in resource demands, availability of new scientific information, and promulgation of new policy. In 2014 the Chugach National Forest assessed these changes and considered input from the State of Alaska, local governments, other federal agencies, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and the public. Based on our assessment and this input, we determined that revision to the 2002 land management plan revision was necessary to ensure management direction is responsive to current issues and conditions (see the Preliminary Need to Change the Forest Plan).

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The need to revise the 2002 land management plan revision is based on six overarching needs for change:

1. **Access.** There is a need to remove site-specific travel management direction that had been included in the 2002 land management plan revision to be consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212). Land management plans are strategic in nature, and by design they do not authorize site-specific activities or uses. The 2002 land management plan revision included site-specific management direction for summer and winter motor vehicle access including an Access and Travel Management Plan.

2. **Areas of Tribal Importance.** There is a need to acknowledge tribal values and the importance of the Chugach National Forest to Alaska Native people, and to better integrate traditional and cultural properties with management direction.

3. **Designated Areas.** There is a need to review special areas on the Chugach National Forest and determine what plan components are needed for existing special areas and whether any additional special areas should be recommended. Stakeholder comments included the need to clarify confusing and vague language in the 2002 land management plan revision regarding the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area.

4. **Ecosystems and Habitats.** There is a need to provide management direction to support terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem functions across the landscape and promote ecosystem resilience to encourage the persistence of native plant and animal species. The key ecosystem functions include air, soil, water, carbon, and landscape scale connectivity across mixed ownerships where natural systems, such as watersheds and wildlife corridors, are shared. Ecosystem diversity is threatened by invasive species, climate change, increased tourism, recreation impacts, and population growth. There is a need to identify thresholds where increased human use may threaten natural systems and address the introduction and expansion of invasive species.

5. **Multiple Uses.** There is a need to address multiple uses on the Chugach National Forest including wood harvest (community and personal use); subsistence resources; renewable energy; infrastructure (roads, trails, and cabins); and special forest products (such as mushrooms, Christmas trees, bark, ferns, berries, herbs, and wildflowers).

6. **Recreation and Tourism.** There is a need to develop a consistent approach for establishing recreation use and guided use capacities across the Chugach National Forest. Integrated plan components are needed to address the uncertainties associated with a changing climate and the timing and location of recreation opportunities and associated infrastructure. There is a need to provide diverse recreation opportunities in cooperation with partners, while protecting the natural, cultural, and scenic environment for present and future generations.

**Revision Topics**

Four “revision topics” were developed from the needs for change described above and the two significant issues identified during scoping (related to recommended wilderness and recreation opportunity spectrum classes). These revision topics were used to analyze effects from the alternatives in the final environmental impact statement; they are summarized below and described in more detail in chapter 1 of the final environmental impact statement.
Land allocations. This revision topic addresses administrative recommendations for additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, designation of management areas, and management direction for special areas.

Recreation opportunities. This revision topic, which includes recreation opportunity spectrum classes, addresses the need to provide diverse recreation opportunities in cooperation with partners; the need to have sustainable recreation infrastructure; and the need to consider effects of a changing climate when planning, designing, and constructing trails, access points, and other recreation-related infrastructure.

Ecological sustainability. This revision topic addresses the need to guide management of key ecosystem functions such as air, soil, water, and vegetation to maintain terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem functions across the landscape.

Social, economic, and cultural sustainability. This revision topic addresses the need for additional management direction regarding the Chugach National Forest’s contribution to the social and economic sustainability of local communities; collaboration and partnerships with other agencies and organizations; incorporation of the interests of Alaska Native Peoples; and the issuing of special use authorizations.

External Engagement
The Forest Service began engaging stakeholders and the public about plan revision in March of 2012. Public participation efforts continued throughout the multi-year plan revision process (2012–2019) with the goal of providing transparency and developing a plan that is responsive to the State of Alaska, local governments, other federal agencies, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and the public. We will continue to work with these groups through plan implementation over the next 15 years.

State of Alaska, Local Governments, and other Federal Agencies
State of Alaska
The State of Alaska has a variety of land ownership and interests within and adjacent to the Chugach National Forest (see the section titled “Relationship between Land Management Plans and Site-Specific Activities” in chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement). I reviewed relevant State management plans and found no inconsistencies with the final land management plan. Since 2013, the State of Alaska provided comments on the revision process, reviewed the draft land management plan and draft environmental impact statement, and communicated throughout with the revision planning team. These interactions enabled the Forest Service to better evaluate whether individual State planning and land use documents were compatible with the land management plan, identify the State’s concerns, and discuss opportunities to resolve or reduce conflicts. For a complete list of meetings with State of Alaska representatives, see the “Public Participation” section of the final environmental impact statement.

During this process, the State of Alaska expressed concerns about the difference between state and federal interpretations of ANILCA, and that the draft land management plan did not specifically call out ANILCA as it relates to management. In response to the State’s concerns, I identified areas in the final land management plan where we could emphasize how Chugach National Forest management is influenced by ANILCA mandates. Additionally, I included in the final land management plan a section titled “Laws Affecting National Forest Management in Alaska,” which highlights some sections of ANILCA the Forest Service must comply with that apply directly to management outlined in the land management plan.
The State also expressed concerns regarding the number of acres recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and miles recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, as well as the prohibition on issuing hunting and fishing guiding permits on the western Copper River Delta. I considered these concerns from the State of Alaska and modified the decision to address these concerns. Details and rationale for these changes are described in the “Decision and Reasons for the Decision” section and the “Commercial Guiding Permits in the Copper River Delta” section in this draft record of decision.

There are some points regarding management of the Chugach National Forest on which the Forest Service and the State of Alaska have not reached resolution; these include the ownership of lands uplifted or subsided during the 1964 earthquake, and whether national recreation trails are conservation system units under ANILCA. These concerns are outside of the land management plan revision process and the scope of this decision, and cannot be answered or resolved here. Detailed responses to the State’s comments on these issues are included in appendix C of the final environmental impact statement. We will continue to work with the State of Alaska to address their specific concerns regarding these and other issues that may arise in the future.

**Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council**

The 1989 oil spill has had long-lasting effects in the Prince William Sound area. At least 10.8 million gallons of crude oil spilled from the *Exxon Valdez*, resulting in the stranding of oil on an estimated 1,300 miles of shoreline in Prince William Sound, along the Kenai Peninsula and lower Cook Inlet, and on the western side of the Alaska Peninsula killing countless plants and animals. An Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (Council) was formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of the $900 million civil settlement. The Council consists of three State of Alaska and three federal trustees (or their designees). The Council is advised by members of the public and by members of the scientific community. I consulted with the Council on plan components for lands acquired with trustee council funds and included acquired lands in the land management plan as Management Area 6 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS)-Acquired Lands.

The final land management plan meets specific covenants that apply to each protected property that are within conservation easements and related documents for the sale, purchase, protection of lands and interests in lands among the Chenega Corporation, Eyak Corporation, Tatitlek Corporation, the United States of America, and the State of Alaska. I will continue to meet with the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council during plan implementation and ensure we comply with specific covenant restrictions particular to each conservation easement.

**Local Governments**

I coordinated with local government representatives regarding the land management plan revision through on-going meetings and/or reviews of the draft land management plan and draft environmental impact statement. These local governments included City of Seward, City of Whittier, City of Valdez, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Matanuska Susitna Borough, Municipality of Anchorage, and Whittier Chamber of Commerce.

Local governments had different opinions about management of the Chugach National Forest:

- Some local governments felt that mining and timber production were not consistent with the current uses of the Chugach National Forest including subsistence, recreation, tourism, and commercial and recreational fishing, all of which are vital to the economy of Prince William Sound communities. These local governments want the entirety of the wilderness study area maintained as if it were part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.
• Some local governments wanted to maintain opportunities for winter sports of all types (motorized and non-motorized) and other recreation opportunities due to the positive economic impact of visitor use.

• Most local governments were concerned about access to in-holding parcels. They feel these private parcels need formal recognition of access in the land management plan.

I considered comments and concerns from local governments in making this decision. All of their concerns were addressed in the responses to comments in the final environmental impact statement and some changes were made to the final environmental impact statement or land management plan. The “Decision and Reasons for the Decision” section of this document explains how the final land management plan maintains current opportunities, determines that timber production is not suitable on the Chugach National Forest, and addresses mining activities. In addition, clarifications were made to address concerns about providing access to in-holding parcels.

Other Federal Agencies
Kenai Fjords National Park is located adjacent to the Chugach National Forest near Seward, Alaska. Park staff provided comments on the draft land management plan, specifically requests for the land management plan to:

• recognize the role of the Kenai Mountain-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area when working with local communities to protect cultural resources within the National Heritage Area;

• build upon the accomplishments of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustees Council;

• address the spread of invasive species; and

• address concerns about the Chugach National Forest authorizing use of lands for salmon hatcheries and the effect on wild salmon stocks.

The final land management plan addresses the first three of these areas of concern through land management plan components. The final environmental impact statement discusses Forest Service authorizations of fish hatcheries required by ANILCA Section 1315(b) and discloses that a portion of the hatchery fish stray into natural stream habitats used by wild fish as shown in Brenner et al. 2012. These stray hatchery fish may be harmful to the productivity and fitness of wild salmon in Prince William Sound. Further studies are underway to evaluate the hatchery fish and wild fish interactions and effects. I look forward to working and partnering with the Kenai Fjords National Park during plan implementation to address their concerns.

Environmental Protection Agency
The Environmental Protection Agency recommended the Forest Supervisor select an alternative that maximized environmental benefits and avoided, minimized, and otherwise mitigated environmental impacts. The Environmental Protection Agency expressed concerns about water quality, safe drinking water, sediment delivery during activities (for example, construction, mining, recreation, residential development, subsistence, electrical transmission, and transportation projects), and impacts to aquatic and terrestrial resources from roads and trails. The Environmental Protection Agency was also concerned about climate change. Other concerns included impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, habitat connectivity, and invasive species.

I considered the Environmental Protection Agency comments when making my decision regarding the final land management plan, which maintains most of the Chugach National Forest in a natural condition and includes plan components to increase ecosystem resilience and sustainability.

**Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations**

Upon initiating plan revision, the Forest Service invited thirteen federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes and fifteen Alaska Native Regional and Village Corporations to attend early engagement workshops, to meet privately, and to consult directly with the Forest Service. The Forest Service hosted a booth at the Alaska Federation of Natives annual conventions in 2012 and 2013, providing information about plan revision efforts. The early consultations, notifications, and meetings were designed to clearly communicate the plan revision process and timeline, to encourage and identify preferred participation method(s), and to identify significant issues for Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.

Targeted engagement with Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations took place between 2015 through 2019. Comments provided by Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations, were used to identify the significant issues and to develop Alternatives C and D.

Key issues raised focused on the need for the revised plan to recognize more explicitly the rights of Native Alaskans, especially rights for access to subsistence resources and to access and develop lands owned by Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations. Some Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations were concerned that wilderness designation would impact these uses and rights. To address these concerns, I worked with the Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations to clarify these uses and rights in the land management plan.

In response to their concerns, plan components were updated or added that include specific actions required to improve communication, provide mutually beneficial outcomes that contribute to socio-economic sustainability of tribal communities and resiliency of the national forest’s natural resources, and sustainable quantities of renewable national forest resources (including culturally significant food resources). My wilderness recommendation addresses the Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations concerns by maintaining the recommended acres from 2002 rather than increasing the acreage.

**Public Participation**

The Forest used a broad range of public involvement methods during the plan revision process. For a detailed description of public participation activities, please see the “Public Participation” section in the final environmental impact statement.

During early stages of the revision process, we hosted pre-assessment workshops and meetings targeting all local communities affected by the existing 2002 land management plan revision, including youth, permittees, neighboring landowners, and minority and low-income population areas. Some of these communities are remote and only accessible by boat or plane.

In December 2015, we published the notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in the Federal Register and received about 1,400 public comments during the subsequent scoping period. Most of the scoping comments were from conservation and wilderness proponents and favored the recommendation for more acres of the wilderness study area to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System and to provide more primitive recreation opportunities.
In 2018, the Chugach National Forest issued a draft land management plan and draft environmental impact statement and hosted nine open houses to capture stakeholder input. We received over 4,000 public comments on the draft land management plan and draft environmental impact statement. The subjects of greatest interest to the public again included the number of acres recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and motorized or non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Responses to comments and concerns are available in appendix C of the final environmental impact statement. All public comments are available in the project page reading room. Comment letters received from Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, the State of Alaska, local government stakeholders, and federal agencies are provided in appendix D of the final environmental impact statement.

**Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

**Decision**

I considered the four land management plan alternatives that were analyzed in the final environmental impact statement and selected a modified version of Alternative C (described in the “Alternatives Analyzed in Detail” section later in this document) as the final land management plan. My decision takes into consideration how well each alternative responds to the identified needs for change and associated revision topics; comments and input from the State of Alaska, local governments, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other federal agencies, and the public; as well as the analysis disclosed in the final environmental impact statement.

My decision addresses the original needs to change as follows:

**Access.** The Access and Travel Management Plan is now a separate document from the final land management plan. This meets direction in the 2005 Travel Management Rule and makes it easier to update as needed since a plan amendment is not required to make updates.

**Areas of Tribal Importance.** The final land management plan includes plan components describing ways the Chugach National Forest will strengthen shared stewardship with Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations. This includes:

- recognizing the importance of the Chugach National Forest as ancestral lands and the need to achieve common desired conditions across shared boundaries;
- increasing cultural awareness;
- sustaining quantities of renewable resources for subsistence purposes, including culturally significant food resources; and
- maintaining access to areas of the Chugach National Forest identified as important for religious and traditional use and as sacred sites. These areas will be managed through continued coordination and consultation with Alaska Native Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.
**Special Areas.** The final land management plan identifies and establishes management for multiple special areas. The final land management plan:

- carries forward the existing administrative recommendation that 1,387,510 acres within the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System;
- carries forward the existing recommendation of nine suitable river segments (82.4 miles) for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and provides plan components to guide their management;
- establishes a “wilderness study area” management area, which clarifies management intent from ANILCA and the Forest Service Alaska Region supplement to the Forest Service national wilderness policy; and
- provides plan components for the management of existing special areas on the Chugach National Forest, including the Iditarod National Historic Trail, Kenai Mountain-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, inventoried roadless areas, key coastal wetlands, national recreation trails, and scenic byways.

**Ecosystems and Habitats.** The final land management plan provides plan components to maintain ecosystem processes, conditions, and services on the Chugach National Forest, including those needed to maintain self-supporting populations of native aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial plants, fish, and wildlife, which are important to Alaska residents and visitors. The final land management plan establishes specific management direction for two species of conservation concern—the dusky Canada goose (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*) and the Aleutian cress (*Aphragmus eschscholtzianus*).

**Multiple Uses.** The final land management plan provides for multiple uses on the Chugach National Forest, including lands suitable for timber (fuelwood and sawtimber for local communities) and wood products (see appendix B of the land management plan for supporting analysis), direction for access to subsistence resources, renewable energy, infrastructure, and special forest products.

**Recreation and Tourism.** The final land management plan promotes the use of partnerships to maintain and strengthen recreation opportunities on the Chugach National Forest and includes direction for recreation sites and trail systems to make them ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable. The final land management plan updates the recreation opportunity spectrum classes and associated maps, bringing management direction in line with current uses, and provides access to and enhancement of winter recreation opportunities and special use authorizations.

**Nature of the Decision**

The purpose of the final land management plan is to guide management on the Chugach National Forest for approximately the next 15 years. The final land management plan is strategic in nature. It does not authorize projects or activities, make irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources, commit the Forest Service to take action, or dictate the day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry out the Forest Service’s internal operations. The final land management plan will be used to design, implement, and monitor site-specific activities, which must be consistent with the direction set forth in the final land management plan.

The final land management plan establishes plan components in the form of goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitability to provide for ecological integrity and contribute to social and economic sustainability of the Chugach National Forest. The plan components and the
forest monitoring program incorporate best available scientific information and together will enable the Forest Service to adapt to new information and new opportunities that may arise in the future.

Reasons for the Decision
The final land management plan represents a way to maintain a healthy, accessible, and sustainable forest that integrates multiple uses; provides social and economic opportunities to the region; promotes education, cultural, and environmental awareness; and supports adaptive forest management that is inclusive and collaborative. Below I describe my rationale for this decision based on the revision topics used in the analysis.

Revision Topic 1: Land Allocations
Wilderness
The 2,116,000-acre Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area was established in 1980 through passage of ANILCA and comprises more than one-third of the Chugach National Forest. Recent land conveyances and corrected shoreline acres due to tidewater glacier retreat have reduced that acreage, and approximately 1.9 million acres of National Forest System lands are currently within the wilderness study area and available for wilderness recommendation.

In accordance with regional policy, all 1.9 million acres of the wilderness study area must be managed to maintain its presently existing character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, until such time as Congress acts on these lands, regardless of whether or not any given acre is recommended for future inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This policy direction applies to all National Forest System lands within the designated wilderness study area.

The wilderness recommendation was of interest to many stakeholders, including the State of Alaska, local governments, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and the public. Some people would like additional acres of recommended wilderness because they value these places as special, or because they believe recommended wilderness management is the best strategy to protect wildlife and aquatic resources. Others prefer that I do not recommend any acres for wilderness designation because they believe management for recommended wilderness is too restrictive. There was approximately an equal interest from those who desired more recommended wilderness and those who preferred less recommended wilderness.

I listened carefully to both advocates and opponents of wilderness recommendation to better understand their interests. Although these interests could be mutually exclusive, I also heard many interests common to both groups. Communities and people within or adjacent to the Chugach National Forest desire that the forest remain much the way it currently is—in a mostly wild and natural state.

Based on our analyses and input from stakeholders, my recommendation is for 1,387,510 acres within the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System, as displayed on a map in the appendix to this decision. This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Plan implementation is not dependent upon subsequent action related to recommendations for wilderness designation. The information considered in making this preliminary administrative recommendation is available in appendix A of the final environmental impact statement, and balances the concerns expressed in public comments.
This decision will maintain the social qualities of the area that are highly valued by stakeholders and the public, including the expansive natural and remote settings that are valued for subsistence uses and by the recreating public. At the same time, this decision selects no newly identified areas for recommendation, rather it recommends the same as put forth in the record of decision for the 2002 land management plan revision (except for land conveyances and corrected shoreline acres due to tidewater glacier retreat), all of which falls within the existing wilderness study area.

In response to public input, I have included a monitoring question and associated indicators to monitor the presently existing character of the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area and to determine whether plan components are sufficient to maintain the social and ecological characteristics of the wilderness study area.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers**

My decision carries forward the 2002 land management plan revision recommendation to designate nine suitable river segments for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (see the appendix to this decision and table 33 of appendix E in the final land management plan). The 2002 land management plan revision evaluated over 760 named rivers and no changed circumstances were found during this current review that would alter the suitability of the identified rivers. Evaluation methods and conclusions from this current review are provided in appendix E of the final land management plan. The final land management plan includes measures designed to retain the free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values of these rivers until at such time they may be officially designated by Congress.

My decision also incorporates a mapping correction to the eligible portion of Childs Glacier. This correction is based on the 2004 appeal resolution decision for the 2002 land management plan revision. Interim protective measures must be applied to maintain preliminary classification, water quality, free-flowing characteristics, and outstandingly remarkable values for rivers the Forest Service determines to be eligible or suitable river segments. These protection measures apply until a decision is made on the future use of the river and adjacent lands through an Act of Congress or a determination that the river is not suitable.

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, Secretary of Agriculture, or the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on designation of rivers as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

**Management Areas**

I received many comments from the public and Chugach National Forest employees regarding the difficulty implementing the 2002 land management plan revision because of the number of management areas. To resolve this problem, my decision consolidates existing management areas from 21 to eight. This will make the land management plan simpler and easier to implement.

For example, river segments identified as eligible or suitable “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational” were formerly separated into three different management areas and are now combined into one. In some cases, management direction that had formerly been addressed through a unique management area, such as for minerals or developed recreation complexes, is now addressed in forestwide plan components. The eight management areas all have specific plan components to address the resource conditions of the area.
Special Areas
My decision provides management direction for multiple special areas on the Chugach National Forest in support of the need for change (see need for change number three in the “Needs for Change” section of this document).

Consistent with the requirements of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, my decision includes a desired condition to protect the roadless character of lands included in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This does not represent new management direction, rather it will support implementation of existing regulatory requirements.

My decision also includes direction to protect the values identified for three trails designated as part of the National Trails System: the Iditarod National Historic Trail, the Resurrection Pass National Recreation Trail, and the Williwaw National Recreation Trail. Protection of these trails supports the need for change (see need for change number six) by providing for diverse recreation opportunities in partnership with other agencies, organizations, and local communities.

My decision also includes plan components for the Seward Highway Scenic Byway, the Kenai Mountain-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, and for the Copper River Delta, a “key coastal wetland” designated by the Alaska Region of the Forest Service. I included these plan components in order to maintain the characteristics for which these areas were designated.

Geographic Areas
My decision establishes plan components for the Copper River Delta, Prince William Sound, and Kenai Peninsula Geographic Areas. I included these plan components to support terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem functions across the landscape and promote ecosystem resilience (see need for change number four) and to maintain the unique qualities of these spatially contiguous geographic areas that were not sufficiently addressed by forestwide plan components.

Revision Topic 2: Recreation Opportunities
In response to the sixth need for change topic (Recreation and Tourism) and extensive public input, my decision updates the recreation opportunity spectrum classes available on the Chugach National Forest and establishes plan components to ensure that recreation sites and trail systems are economically and socially sustainable, are supported by communities and partners, and reflect current and future public needs and demands commensurate with Forest Service financial capabilities.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes
In order to provide diverse recreation opportunities, I have included a range of recreation opportunity spectrum classes that will allow flexibility to address emerging trends in recreation. Management of recreation settings is a foundational element to providing diverse and sustainable opportunities for public recreation experiences. It is important to note that assigning recreation opportunity spectrum classes across the Chugach National Forest does not alter or curtail access rights provided for by ANILCA, including access for traditional activities (Section 1110(a)) and for subsistence activities (Section 811(a)).

My decision includes several changes to recreation opportunity spectrum classes that I believe better align with existing recreation use patterns on the Chugach National Forest; meet the need to integrate interests of Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and the State of Alaska; provide for diverse recreation opportunities; and support local economies. In response to public comments, my decision also balances the number of acres in the primitive recreation opportunity spectrum class with those in less restrictive classes (table 1).
Table 1. Recreation opportunity spectrum classes for all alternatives

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<td>(percent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primitive</td>
<td>2,498,666 (46)</td>
<td>2,498,666 (46)</td>
<td>2,899,932 (54)</td>
<td>2,943,228 (54)</td>
<td>2,093,288 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-primitive Non-motorized</td>
<td>1,535,709 (28)</td>
<td>1,557,772 (29)</td>
<td>840,944 (16)</td>
<td>797,819 (15)</td>
<td>1,594,338 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-primitive Non-motorized (Winter Motorized Allowed)</td>
<td>704,998 (13)</td>
<td>692,316 (13)</td>
<td>1,134,683 (21)</td>
<td>1,134,550 (21)</td>
<td>1,257,213 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-primitive Motorized</td>
<td>583,284 (11)</td>
<td>574,556 (11)</td>
<td>449,129 (8)</td>
<td>449,151 (8)</td>
<td>379,543 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roaded Natural</td>
<td>85,810 (1)</td>
<td>85,730 (1)</td>
<td>89,992 (1)</td>
<td>89,931 (1)</td>
<td>90,296 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>6,681 (less than 1)</td>
<td>6,110 (less than 1)</td>
<td>469 (less than 1)</td>
<td>470 (less than 1)</td>
<td>469 (less than 1)</td>
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**Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area.** Within the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, I chose to use the recreation opportunity spectrum classes in Alternative B, except for along the southeast and northwest side of Blackstone Bay. In these areas the shoreline is in a semi-primitive non-motorized setting and the inland is in a primitive setting as described in Alternative C. On the northwest side of Blackstone Bay, a semi-primitive non-motorized setting is retained along the shoreline as described in Alternative C.

This decision reflects public and tribal input on where access for traditional activities or subsistence uses are currently occurring and maintains a semi-primitive non-motorized (winter motorized allowed) class on the ice fields around Blackstone Bay and near Nellie Juan Lake and Nellie Juan River. In areas within the wilderness study area near Whittier and Valdez, I retained the semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunity spectrum class to allow for continued economic growth while still maintaining the area’s presently existing character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

My decision also includes several changes to recreation opportunity spectrum classes outside of the wilderness study area, including designating Burns Glacier as semi-primitive non-motorized to reduce conflicts between user groups while allowing access for both motorized and non-motorized recreationists; identifying a portion of the Godwin Glacier as semi-primitive motorized to allow for continued access for outfitting and guiding opportunities in the area; and designating the south side of Copper River Highway from Eyak River to Copper River as semi-primitive non-motorized (winter motorized allowed) to address public comments about the need to protect important breeding and nesting habitat for dusky Canada Geese and other waterfowl and shorebirds from overland motorized use in summer months.
Kenai Peninsula. In response to public comments, my decision changes much of the semi-primitive motorized portion of the Kenai Peninsula to semi-primitive non-motorized (winter motorized allowed). This change reflects the types of recreation use allowed by current travel management decisions and the change to a non-motorized setting for summer months. The change would apply to the following specific areas (see the recreation opportunity spectrum map in the appendix to this decision):

- Between the Hope Highway and Palmer Creek Road near the town of Sunrise
- West of Palmer Creek Road and on either side of Resurrection Creek south to Wolf Creek
- The entire area east of Hope Highway and west of Turnagain Pass
- The area around Summit Lake and Quartz Creek drainage east of the Seward Highway
- The area west of Snug Harbor road (to and including Stetson Creek and Cooper Creek drainage)
- The Grant Lake drainage and the eastern portion of the Falls Creek drainage
- The south fork of Snow River and the Godwin Glacier area

My decision also increases the primitive recreation opportunity spectrum class by a combined 77,067 acres in Snow River and Upper Mills Creek. This change creates two additional primitive recreation opportunity spectrum class areas accessible from the highway system in the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area.

Other Areas. My decision makes changes to multiple other areas to make the recreation opportunity spectrum class consistent with current travel management decisions or current conditions. These include:

- The areas adjacent to Crow Creek Road and the Upper Winner Creek drainage, the recreation opportunity spectrum class would change from semi-primitive non-motorized to semi-primitive non-motorized (winter motorized allowed).
- The Twentymile tributary, where the recreation opportunity spectrum class would change from semi-primitive non-motorized (winter motorized allowed) to semi-primitive motorized.
- The Spencer Whistlestop area, where the recreation opportunity spectrum class would change from semi-primitive motorized to roaded natural. This change reflects the current condition with the Spencer Whistlestop area having a higher level of recreation development, a larger number of parties encountered per day, and a more roaded environment than is appropriate for a semi-primitive motorized class.

Mining Claims. My decision changes rural recreation opportunity spectrum classes located in areas with mining claims in the 2002 land management plan revision to the surrounding recreation opportunity spectrum class. Mining claim ownership and claim boundaries change frequently, so individual recreation opportunity spectrum classes are not appropriate for these areas. This will facilitate implementation of the final land management plan by eliminating patchy recreation opportunity spectrum classes in these areas, allowing for consistent management. The only exception to this change is the area directly south of Hope on the Kenai Peninsula where historic and modern placer operations have modified the natural environment in many places and where long-term mining operations are planned.
Commercial Guiding Authorizations in the Copper River Delta

To facilitate rural prosperity and economic development, and in response to comments from the State of Alaska and members of the public, my decision allows for consumptive commercial guiding authorizations in the western portion of the Copper River Delta. I believe that special use authorizations for outfitting and guiding are better managed at the local level rather than at the broader programmatic level of a land management plan. I do, however, acknowledge local concerns over potential for overcrowding and in response to these concerns I have included a desired condition and a management approach to address potential overcrowding impacting local users.

Revision Topic 3: Ecological Sustainability

My decision includes plan components for ecological integrity of aquatic, riparian and terrestrial ecosystems necessary to sustain a diversity of vegetation, fish, and wildlife communities, including the persistence of native species. For more information, see the section on “Requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule” in this document.

Additionally, the Alaska Regional Forester identified two species of conservation concern on the Chugach National Forest: the dusky Canada goose (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*) and Aleutian cress (*Aphragmus eschscholtzianus*). Concerns about the viability of the dusky Canada goose stem from the 1964 earthquake, which uplifted wetlands that hosted nesting sites in the Copper River Delta. Once the uplifted wetlands drained, nest sites became more vulnerable to predation. Consistent with the Pacific Flyway Council’s management plan for the dusky Canada goose, the Chugach National Forest initiated a program to provide low-predation-risk nesting habitat that is supported by plan components in the final land management plan.

The Aleutian cress was identified as a species of conservation concern because the alpine habitat on which this plant depends is likely to decrease as climate continues to change. Plan components were developed to support the persistence of Aleutian cress, but it may not be within the inherent capability of the plan area to maintain or restore the ecological conditions to maintain a viable population of Aleutian cress due to the changing climate. While only one population of Aleutian cress has been documented on the Chugach National Forest, much of its habitat has not been surveyed and more populations may exist.

Revision Topic 4: Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability

The final land management plan emphasizes partnerships and collaborative relationships while acknowledging the values and interests in the Chugach National Forest held by Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and the State of Alaska. Plan components allow for sustainable levels of goods and services, such as recreation and tourism opportunities, outfitter and guide services, established fisheries, minerals extraction and energy generation, forest products, and ecosystem stewardship opportunities. These goods and services contribute to the local economy through generation of jobs and income while creating a variety of products for use, both locally and nationally. For more information, see the “Requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule” section of this document.

Economic Contributions of the Chugach National Forest

The primary ways the Chugach National Forest impacts jobs and income include:

- recreational visitor spending in the local area;
- spending of transfer payments to states (for example, Secure Rural Schools payments);
• spending of salary and non-salary federal funds by the Forest Service;
• special use authorizations;
• sustaining fisheries that support commercial fishing, sportfishing, subsistence fishing, and processing industries that account for significant employment. The commercial fishing sector is the single largest in terms of employment in the Valdez-Cordova Census Area and Kenai Peninsula Borough.
• fuelwood as a primary or secondary home heating source is important to local communities within and adjacent to the Chugach National Forest.

Other activities related to resource use and extraction—such as timber harvest, gathering of other forest products, and mining—occur within or can be linked to the Chugach National Forest. In a number of these cases, the magnitude of the activity is relatively small and hard to assess relative to the regional economy as a whole, making it difficult to accurately model economic impacts. For example, no commercial sales of sawtimber have occurred in the past five years; however, fuelwood is used as a heating source in local communities within and adjacent to the national forest.

The final environmental impact statement for the 2002 land management plan revision analyzed the potential for oil and gas production on the Chugach National Forest by dividing it into four zones and analyzing each zone for potential oil and gas production. In Zone 1, the 1982 Chugach Natives, Incorporated Settlement Agreement gave the Chugach Alaska Corporation rights to drill from a private portion of the mineral estate beneath the Chugach National Forest with the rights to be extinguished if a producing well was not established by December 31, 2004, which did not occur. In Zone 2, the 1982 Chugach Natives, Incorporated Settlement Agreement gave Chugach Alaska Corporation first opportunity to acquire, through exchange, the rights to explore, develop and produce oil and gas in the area in the event that the Secretary of Agriculture elected to make all or any part of the area available for oil and gas leasing. The exchange rights terminated on January 2, 2008. Zones 3 and 4 had low or no oil and gas production potential. Based on the 2002 analysis, I am carrying forward the decision from the 2002 record of decision that all four zones of the Chugach National Forest remain unavailable for oil and gas leasing.

My decision will result in no quantifiable changes in economic impacts, such as employment or income effects. Activities related to the Chugach National Forest will continue to contribute to the local economy through the generation of jobs and income while creating a variety of other benefits to people, both nationally and locally.

Under the final land management plan:

• Spending on recreational visits to the Chugach National Forest will remain the same or increase slightly with the increase in areas available for winter motorized access.
• Payments from the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act and Payments In Lieu of Taxes are estimated to support 70 jobs (full or part time) and approximately 4.3 million dollars in income (2016 dollars) each year.
• Spending by the Chugach National Forest of approximately 16 million dollars (2016 Chugach National Forest budget) is estimated to support 280 full- or part-time jobs and 18 million dollars in labor income.
• Water quantity and quality will remain the same, and is expected to maintain fish habitat and the economic contribution from commercial fishing, sportfishing, subsistence fishing, and fish processing industries.

• We are unable to quantify economic contributions, such as employment or spending from the types of activities we authorize through special uses, however, the economic contribution is expected to remain the same or increase if more special uses are authorized.

• There will be no changes to the accessibility of fuelwood.

Access and Travel Management
My Decision separates the existing Access and Travel Management Plan, which was integrated into the 2002 land management plan revision, into a separate document. The existing access and travel management decisions will remain in effect, but because they are separate from the final land management plan, these decisions will be easier to update on a project-level basis in the future.

This does not mean that the decisions on motorized use in the 2002 Plan would be nullified; those decisions, such as the 2007 Kenai Winter Access Record of Decision, remain in place. Authorized routes that are open and closed to motor vehicle use will be displayed on the Chugach National Forest’s Motor Vehicle Use Map, and will be updated as new decisions are made. Similarly, routes and areas closed to winter motorized use will be displayed on an Over Snow Vehicle Use Map. Both maps are available to the public on the Chugach National Forest website.

In some cases, existing travel management decisions are not consistent with recreation opportunity spectrum classes identified as desired conditions in this land management plan decision. Areas where future site-specific travel management decisions will be needed to move the Chugach National Forest towards desired conditions are disclosed in chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement.

The 2002 land management plan revision decision for helicopter landings has also been retained. Any future changes where helicopter landings are allowed will be made through a project-level analysis and decision. Use of boats and aircraft by the public for recreational or other purposes will be managed through forest orders, consistent with ANILCA and other applicable laws and agreements. The final land management plan does, however, include plan components related to authorized (commercial) and administrative uses of boats and aircraft.

Cultural Sustainability
The Chugach National Forest is viewed by affected Alaska Native Tribes as critical to their identity and the continued welfare of their people. In addition to responding to specific comments received from Tribes (see section on “External Engagement” in this document), the final land management plan reinforces compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act through the implementation of the Programmatic Agreement among the USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region; the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; and the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office. The agreement addresses Heritage Program Management on national forests in the State of Alaska to protect cultural resources, defined as objects or definite location of human activity, occupation, or use identifiable through field survey, historical documentation, or oral evidence.

Requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule

The Chugach National Forest final land management plan has been prepared in compliance with the Forest Service’s 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR Part 219). My decision meets the specific 2012 Planning Rule requirements at sections 219.8–219.11 as follows.

219.8 Sustainability

Social and Economic Sustainability

The final land management plan contributes to social and economic sustainability by:

- Including plan components that maintain water quantity and quality for fish habitat, which supports commercial fishing, sportfishing, subsistence fishing, and fish processing industries.

- Emphasizing partnerships and agreements with communities, businesses, and non-profits to deliver programs, projects and services.

- Promoting continued engagement with the State of Alaska, Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and local communities to reduce hazardous fuels in an all-hands and all-lands approach, including updating Community Wildfire Protection Plans using the four goals and actions tied to the Alaska State Forest Action Plan: wildfire and public safety, forest health, community forestry, and forest stewardship programs.

- Supporting Alaska Native people’s way of life through new plan components tied to mutual and shared interests such as land ownership and entitlements, traditional uses, statutory rights, and working agreements.

- Supporting Alaska Native regional and village corporations rights to develop their surface and subsurface estates, which may include access and development on, across, or adjacent to the Chugach National Forest, consistent with ANILCA and other laws.

- Recognizing the importance of recreation to residents, visitors, and the regional economy by providing for diverse recreation opportunities in cooperation with partners, while protecting the natural, cultural, and scenic environment for present and future generations.

- Managing recreation facilities based on use and maintaining the ability to sustain facilities, resources, visitor experiences and use, and encouraging partnerships to help manage new and existing facilities.

- Supporting the social and economic opportunities and interests of residents and businesses through special use authorizations for fish hatcheries, communication sites, utilities, hydroelectric facilities, outfitters and guides, recreation events, cabins, resorts, and campground concessionaires.

- Maintaining watershed health and important habitat for salmon, which supports a commercial salmon harvest valued at more than $19 million annually and generates over 3,000 jobs.

- Acknowledging the importance of subsistence uses for local communities and supporting these uses including wild renewable resources such as fish, game, berries, wood, and medicinal plants.

6 Alaska Department of Natural Resources. 2016. State forest action plan. Anchorage, AK: State of Alaska, Alaska Division of Forestry.
• Supporting the availability of fuelwood for personal use as an important economic factor for residents due to the high cost of heating fuel in many rural areas.

• Recognizing the potential for the development of locatable minerals such as gold, and salable minerals such as sand and gravel, quarry rock, and other minerals.

**Ecological Sustainability**

The final land management plan contributes to ecological sustainability by:

• Maintaining largely intact, highly functioning terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds.

• Promoting ecosystem resilience to encourage the persistence of native plant and animal species in a changing climate by emphasizing the use of adaptive management as knowledge about these trends continues to grow.

• Informing plan components with the *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment for the Chugach National Forest and the Kenai Peninsula.*7

• Developing plan components for the interdependence of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and the ability of these ecosystems within the plan area to adapt to changes from system drivers and stressors, such as the potential effects of a changing climate and forest insects and diseases.

• Promoting hazardous fuel reduction near communities by continuing to work with neighboring communities to reduce fuel levels.

• Supporting the continued restoration of resources and services injured by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, consistent with the 1994 *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Plan.

• Supporting and protecting internationally significant ecosystem functions in the Copper River Delta, the largest contiguous wetland complex on North America’s Pacific coast.

• Maintaining air quality including during prescribed fire activities, providing for soil productivity, preventing erosion, and protecting water resources in the plan area.

• Requiring the use of best management practices when undertaking management activities.

• Identifying and maintaining or restoring priority watersheds in accordance with the agency’s Watershed Condition Framework8 to maintain or restore the diversity of ecosystems and habitat types by focusing on maintaining or restoring key characteristics associated with the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, including a diversity of native tree species.

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219.9 Diversity of Plant and Animal communities

The final land management plan meets the coarse filter requirements for the diversity of plant and animal communities by:

- Maintaining the ecological integrity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and watersheds by maintaining natural disturbance regimes (for example, glacial action, snow avalanches, earthquakes, floods, native insects and pathogens, windthrow, lightning-caused fire, and climatic variations) as the primary mechanisms shaping the landscape and ecological communities.
- Supporting ecosystem services which help sustain hunting and subsistence opportunities.
- Supporting the ecological processes and conditions necessary to maintain habitat quantity, quality, and distributions of self-supporting populations of native plants, fish, and wildlife.
- Incorporating species-specific plan components that support federally listed species and species of conservation concern (dusky Canada goose and Aleutian cress).
- Consulting with the National Marine Fisheries Service on plan components to protect populations of the endangered fin whale, endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale, humpback whale, and Steller sea lion.

219.10 Multiple Uses

The final land management plan provides for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish by:

- Supporting the persistence of fish and wildlife and other renewable resources, which support robust commercial salmon fisheries, subsistence, recreation, and a tourism economy.
- Providing opportunities for forest products, fuelwood, and sawtimber for local communities through small-scale vegetation management activities along road corridors and various restoration and habitat management activities.

219.11 Timber Requirements based on the National Forest Management Act

The final land management plan addresses timber requirements in the National Forest Management Act by:

- Identifying that no lands are suitable for timber production within the Chugach National Forest (final land management plan, appendix B).
- Identifying 11,170 acres suitable for the management of wood products for purposes other than timber production, including free use timber and fuelwood per 36 CFR 223.10 and 223.5.
- Managing vegetation to restore and enhance wildlife habitat and to reduce the risk of wildfires near communities and infrastructure.
Alternative Development

Alternatives were developed around the four revision topics, which were based on the need to change (see the “Needs for Change” section in this document) and the two significant issues (recommended wilderness and recreation opportunity spectrum classes) identified based on scoping comments. The “Alternatives” section (chapter 2) of the final environmental impact statement describes each alternative and provides detailed information on how the action alternatives were developed.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Alternative A, No Action

Alternative A is the 2002 land management plan revision and record of decision. The 2002 land management plan revision includes 21 management areas with management area prescriptions that include desired conditions, suitability determinations, and standards and guidelines. This alternative recommends about 1.4 million acres (72 percent) of National Forest System lands in the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area for wilderness area designation. Alternative A does not explicitly address ecological, social, and economic sustainability or climate change.

I did not select this alternative because it does not adequately respond to the need to change and includes a large number of management areas, making implementation difficult.

Alternative B

Alternative B is the draft land management plan that was released as the proposed action for public scoping in 2015. The wilderness recommendation is the same area as in Alternative A, about 1.4 million acres in the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. Although I did not select this alternative as a whole, I did select the wilderness recommendation from Alternative B because it best responds to diverse public comments on this topic (see discussion in “Reasons for the Decision” section above).

Alternative B consolidates the 21 management areas from Alternative A into eight management areas with associated plan components.

Recreation opportunity spectrum classes in Alternative B are the same as Alternative A for the Prince William Sound and Copper River Delta Geographic Areas. In the Seward Ranger District within the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area, Alternative B incorporates changes to recreation opportunity spectrum classes to make them consistent with the Kenai Winter Access Record of Decision.

I did select the wilderness recommendation from Alternative B as part of the Selected Alternative as it best balanced the comments for how many acres to recommend for inclusion in the Wilderness Preservation System. I did not select all of the other parts of Alternative B as part of the Selected Alternative because they did not balance the requests for non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities and did not include recreation opportunity spectrum class changes to meet all the current and anticipated conditions on the Chugach National Forest.

Alternative C (as Proposed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement)

Alternative C was identified as the preferred alternative in the final environmental impact statement. Like Alternative B, this alternative consolidates the 21 management areas from Alternative A into eight management areas with associated plan components.
In response to public comments expressing interest in additional acres of recommended wilderness, Alternative C recommends about 1.8 million acres (94 percent) of the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area for wilderness designation. Alternative C also includes a mapping and acreage correction for the section of Childs Glacier determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

In addition to the recreation opportunity spectrum class changes described for Alternative B, Alternative C makes additional changes to more accurately reflect the types of recreation use allowed by current travel management decisions including making changes in some areas to a non-motorized setting for summer months and motorized use for winter months. The changes respond to public comments to balance the need for motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, and include shifting nearly all of the western Prince William Sound Geographic Area to the primitive recreation opportunity spectrum class. In the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area, approximately 65,000 acres that had been designated “front country” would change to “backcountry” management area. This change would better reflect management intent for these relatively remote areas and respond to public comments that front country management area boundaries were too broad.

Alternative C includes plan components that strengthen language for collaboration and partnerships; clarify access and uses of Chugach National Forest lands near private inholdings; and strengthen management for ecosystem integrity.

A modified Alternative C is the Selected Alternative. I selected it because it balances the need for motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. One of the reasons that I did not select the wilderness recommendation from Alternative C, as part of the Selected Alternative, is because it did not adequately balance non-motorized and motorized uses.

**Modified Alternative C (Selected Alternative)**

I selected Modified Alternative C as the final land management plan (Selected Alternative). This alternative recommends about 1.4 million acres (72 percent) of National Forest System lands in the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area for wilderness designation as mapped in the appendix to this decision. For a detailed description of why I selected this alternative (the final land management plan), please see the “Decision and Reasons for the Decision” section in this document.

The final land management plan has plan components that apply forestwide, as well as components specific to special areas, geographic areas, and eight management areas. The Selected Alternative responds to public comments by adding plan components that strengthen language for collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders and clarify access and uses of National Forest System lands near private inholdings. It also responds to public comments by adding and strengthening plan components for ecosystem integrity.

The final land management plan includes the mapping and acreage correction for the section of Childs Glacier determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System as displayed in Alternative C that resulted in a slight increase in acreage for Management Area 2 Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers. As such, there was a corresponding slight decrease in acreage to Management Area 5ANILCA 501(b) Areas.
The final land management plan includes:

- Forestwide and geographic area goals, desired conditions, objectives, suitability, standards, and guidelines that meet the social, economic, and ecological sustainability requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule and are consistent with the goals and objectives of the USDA Strategic Plan FY 2018–2022 and Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2015–2020.

- Updated recreation opportunity spectrum classes and associated maps to better guide where recreation opportunities should occur and to what condition they should be managed. My final land management plan decision incorporates the mapped recreation opportunity spectrum attached in the appendix at the end of this decision.

- Incorporates the winter and summer motorized access and travel management decisions made in the 2002 land management plan revision record of decision and other site-specific access and travel management decisions made since 2002 as the current access and travel management decisions for the Chugach National Forest (2005 Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR Part 212).

**Alternative D**

Alternative D is also the same as Alternative C except for changes to the area recommended for wilderness and to some recreation opportunity spectrum classes.

In response to public comments, Alternative D increases the area recommended for wilderness designation. Under this alternative, 97 percent of the Nellie Juan-College Fiord wilderness study area is recommended for wilderness designation (about 1.8 million acres) with the exception of Blackstone Bay, the Nellie Juan Lake and Nellie Juan River area, and all Exxon Valdez oil spill-acquired and other split estate lands.

Winter snowmachine use is still allowed within the wilderness study area, consistent with the definition of traditional activities (see glossary in the final land management plan) and as provided for by ANILCA Section 1110(a). In the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area, the backcountry management area is approximately 3,896 acres more than in Alternative C, and approximately 69,251 acres more than in Alternative B.

I did not select any of Alternative D because it does not balance motorized and non-motorized access and the recommendation for wilderness area designation does not respond to comments requesting fewer recommended wilderness acres.

**Alternatives Considered but Not in Detail**

Federal agencies are required to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14).

Public comments on the proposed action suggested alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives were outside the scope of this revision effort or duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail. Four alternatives (or alternative variations) were considered but eliminated from detailed consideration for reasons summarized in chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement.
The following alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study:

- Implement a commercial timber harvest program
- Do not recommend any areas for wilderness area designation
- Consider the following areas for wilderness area designation:
  - Gulch Creek and Alpenglow Complex
  - Snow River and Greater Paradise Lakes Valley
  - Green, Montague, Evans, Hawkins, and Hinchinbrook islands
- Recommend the entire wilderness study area for wilderness area designation

After considering the analyses of Alternatives A through D, and the alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study, I find that a reasonable range of alternatives has been carefully evaluated in compliance with National Environmental Policy Act procedures. All action alternatives are realistic, implementable, and responsive to the land management plan revision topics.

**Environmental Impact Statement and Land Management Plan Changes**

In response to comments on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan, new information, and further internal reviews, some changes were made in the final environmental impact statement and land management plan.

A full list of changes is provided in chapter 1 of the final environmental impact statement; highlights are summarized below.

**Changes to the Environmental Impact Statement:**

- Alternative C was selected as the preferred alternative.
- The Childs Glacier recommendation as eligible for the National Wild and Scenic River System was updated in Alternative C to reflect the acres in the appeal resolution for the 2002 land management plan revision.
- References were added or updated.
- In response to comments, the “Travel Management” section was updated to include various non-motorized activities.
- The “Forest Products” section was updated to show that none of the alternatives would change the number of acres accessible for wood products management or the area available for Alaska free use on the Chugach National Forest (see the “Summary of Environmental Consequences by Alternative” section).
- Information from the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change final report was incorporated.
- Text and tables were updated due to new information including IMPLAN 2016, U.S. Census Bureau 2019, and economic and social assessments from 2016. The subsistence analysis was updated with new salmon abundance and escapement information from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Water quality condition rating for impaired waters that are not 303(d) listed was updated with new information.
• The “Recreation Infrastructure and Access” section was updated to include access allowed for traditional activities under ANILCA in the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study area.

• The list of memoranda of understandings was updated in appendix B.

• Appendix C was added to the final environmental impact statement and contains responses to comments on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan.

• Appendix D was added to the final environmental impact statement and contains comment letters received on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan from Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, State of Alaska, local governments and federal agencies.

Changes to the Land Management Plan:

• Eliminated redundancy, made corrections to, or added plan components in response to comments on the draft land management plan.

• Added a section to the land management plan, “Laws Affecting National Forest Management in Alaska,” to describe how ANCSA and ANILCA relate to management of the Chugach National Forest.

• Recognized that planned and unplanned fire management activities need to employ management actions that minimize the adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources and limit the potential for spread of invasive species.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is that which causes the least harm to the biological and physical environment and best protects and preserves historic, cultural and natural resources. Alternative D is the environmentally preferred alternative. The main difference between the alternatives is the amount of wilderness recommended and this is the primary basis for the determination. Alternative D would include more acreage recommended as wilderness. Should Congress designate wilderness, it would impose statutory protections for the biological and physical environment and historic, cultural, and natural resources on the ground. More acres would fall under this statutory protection with Alternative D, making it the environmentally preferable alternative.

Best Available Scientific Information

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the responsible official to document how the best available scientific information was used to inform the assessment, the plan decision, and the monitoring program. Such documentation must identify what information was determined to be the best available scientific information, explain the basis for that determination, and explain how the information was applied to the issues considered.

I have reviewed the science used to develop the assessment and the final land management plan, and to analyze the effects of the proposed action and alternatives. I find the best available scientific information was used.

The assessment provided the foundation for development of plan components, environmental analysis, and the monitoring program. The best available scientific information used in the assessment is described in chapter 1 of the assessment. Information from the assessment was updated and augmented throughout the planning process; for example, the final environmental impact statement was updated with new information from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. Census Bureau.
The following list summarizes, but is not fully inclusive of, the science used to develop the final land management plan and environmental impact statement. Citations in the environmental impact statement are used to link findings to the best available scientific information used in the analysis.

- Science related to disturbance processes, which informed analysis of all resources and guided development of plan components, is summarized in the first two sections of chapter 3 of the environmental impact statement.
- Projected trends from the 2017 *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment for the Chugach National Forest and the Kenai Peninsula* are summarized in chapter 3 of the environmental impact statement. This peer reviewed publication addresses ecological and socio-economic effects of changing climate, including glacial recession.
- Forest Service scientists from the Forest Health Protection staff contributed information on the status and trends of forest insects and diseases.
- A biological assessment and biological evaluation were prepared according to agency standards.
- Informal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service on the endangered fin whale, endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale, humpback whale, and Steller sea lion has resulted in the National Marine Fisheries Service concurrence with the Forest Service “not likely to adversely affect” determinations for these species.
- Documentation supporting the Regional Forester’s selection of species of conservation concern is in the planning record and available on request. This information was used to develop plan components for the species of conservation concern and analyze the environmental consequences of the alternatives.
- Information from the Forest Service Watershed Condition Framework was used to develop plan components and identify priority watersheds.
- The National Landcover Database, National Wetlands Inventory, and forest-level plant community classification were used to develop plan components for vegetation and analyze effects of alternatives. Trends related to disturbance processes such as glacial recession, mortality from forest insects and diseases, and human-caused fire were considered.
- Results from the Forest Service’s National Visitor Use Monitoring Program informed development of plan components related to recreation and analysis of the alternatives.
- An economic contribution analysis estimates how the Chugach National Forest contributes to regional employment and labor income. The 2016 Economic Impact Analysis for Planning (IMPLAN) modeling system was used to estimate the economic contributions.
- The minerals analysis employs the most recent U.S. Geological Survey maps of mineral potential (2016–17).
- Documentation of science supporting the selection of each monitoring question and associated indicators is included in the planning record and is available on request.
- Documentation from monitoring and evaluation reports completed for the 2002 land management plan revision were used to inform the assessment process.
Research Station Director Concurrence

The Pacific Northwest Research Station completed the science review of the Socioeconomic Modeling and Analysis of the 2018 Chugach Land Management Plan Revision\(^9\) and analysis of plan components for research natural areas. The research station’s review team followed the science review process outlined in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12 chapter 0). Science reviews, in general, focus on four primary areas relevant to the land management planning process and decision documents:

- Has the applicable scientific information been considered?
- Is the scientific information interpreted reasonably and accurately?
- Are the uncertainties associated with the information acknowledged and documented?
- Have the relevant consequences, including risks and uncertainties, been identified and documented?

The Acting Station Director found the “socioeconomic modeling and analysis in support of the Chugach National Forest land management plan was adequate in terms of the consideration and interpretation of available scientific information and tools given the range of actions in the forest plan alternatives under consideration.”

Findings Required by Laws and Executive Orders

Acts of Congress

Accessibility Acts

The Forest Service and its cooperators are required to incorporate access standards into all of the agency’s “Federally Conducted” or “Federally Assisted” facilities, programs, services, or activities. This direction is mandated in the following laws and regulations: Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 1978; Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title V, Section 507) and 7 CFR 15(e). The Chugach National Forest has incorporated accessibility requirements into the final land management plan and associated documentation.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

ANILCA Section 501b Copper River Delta

ANILCA Section 501(b) states the primary purpose of management of lands within the Copper River Delta (as designated by the Act) shall be the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats. I assigned these lands to Management Area 5 ANILCA 501(b) Areas. In addition to the forestwide and geographic area plan components for conservation of fish and wildlife, I ensured that the intent of ANILCA Section 501(b) is met through the provision of additional plan components specific to Management Area 5 ANILCA 501(b) Areas. These include desired conditions to protect fish and wildlife species and their habitat, restrictions on the circumstances under which recreation or administrative infrastructure may be built, and a guideline limiting use of motorized equipment for purposes other than conservation of fish and wildlife.

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ANILCA Section 810 Subsistence Uses

Subsistence use evaluation and determination is not required for land management plan approval. Land management plans are programmatic-level decisions and are not a determination whether to “withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy, or disposition” of National Forest System lands. However, a forestwide evaluation and determination is included in chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement to facilitate future project-level planning and decisionmaking in compliance with ANILCA Section 810.

I concur with the analysis in chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement and find that implementation of the selected alternative will not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses. Forestwide plan components, including standards and guidelines and management area plan components, reflect the policies of Title VIII of ANILCA. To maintain the federal rural priority of fish and game for qualified rural Alaska residents and in response to public comments, a desired condition and management approach provide for the local line officer to consider and potentially issue outfitting and guiding special use authorizations for fishing and hunting in the western portion of the Copper River Delta (Game Management Unit 6C).

ANILCA “No More” Clauses

The State of Alaska and a few Alaska Native Corporations raised concerns that the final land management plan is not consistent with ANILCA including Section 101(d) and Section 1326(b), referred to as the “no more” clauses.

The final land management plan is consistent with ANILCA because it is a forest-specific plan and not a statewide evaluation and not a single purpose study. I considered the important congressional determinations, findings, and information in ANILCA when making the final recommendations and decisions. The Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area was established through passage of ANILCA. Approximately 1.9 million acres of National Forest System lands are within the wilderness study area and available for recommendation. My recommendation to include about 1.4 million acres of the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area in the National Wilderness Preservation System is the same as what was recommended in the 2002 land management plan revision record of decision. This meets ANILCA Section 704 requirement for a “recommendation as to the suitability or non-suitability of all areas within such wilderness study boundaries for preservation of wilderness....” The 2012 Planning Rule also requires a wilderness inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommendation process (Forest Service Manual 1923.04c). Forest Service Handbook 1924.04d requires wild and scenic river studies and recommendations.

Clean Air Act

At the scale of a programmatic plan such as this, the overall level of activities proposed under this decision is not anticipated to degrade air quality or violate State of Alaska air quality implementation plans. The final land management plan includes a desired condition that “prescribed burning on National Forest System lands is coordinated with the State of Alaska. Smoke from prescribed burning is short in duration and meets State of Alaska standards.” My finding is based on information presented in the final environmental impact statement. No communities within or directly adjacent to the Chugach National Forest are classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as non-attainment areas or maintenance areas. More detailed air quality impact analyses will be made at subsequent levels of planning and analysis, where emissions can be more accurately quantified and reasonably forecasted and local impacts assessed.
Clean Water Act
Implementation of this final land management plan is expected to maintain and improve water quality and satisfy all State of Alaska water quality requirements. I base this finding on the standards and guidelines in the final land management plan, the application of approved “best management practices” specifically designed to protect water quality, and the discussion of water quality and beneficial uses contained in chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement. Additionally, project-level analysis for subsequent activities implemented under the final land management plan will be required to demonstrate compliance with Clean Water Act and State of Alaska water quality standards.

Endangered Species Act
Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires all federal agencies to ensure that agency actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of federally listed species, or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

Four federally listed species are known to occur within the Chugach National Forest plan area that fall under the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and no listed species administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Forest Service submitted a biological assessment to National Marine Fisheries Service on April 8, 2019, and requested their concurrence with the biological assessment’s “not likely to adversely affect” determinations. We also requested informal consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act on the endangered fin whale, endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale, humpback whale, and Steller sea lion.

Based on the early coordination and pre-consultation communication, the land management plan includes plan components to address National Marine Fisheries Service concerns and meet National Marine Fisheries Service species recovery plans including:

- general mitigation measures for marine mammal viewing to protect fin whale, Cook Inlet beluga whale, humpback whale, and Steller sea lions from disturbance or collision,
- seasonal special use authorization restrictions in Twentymile River and other waters to protect seasonally important foraging habitat for the Cook Inlet beluga whale,
- protection of National Marine Fisheries Service designated critical habitat for the Cook Inlet beluga whale, and
- plan components to mitigate effects to Steller sea lion critical habitat, rookeries, and haulouts.

On June 21, 2019, National Marine Fisheries Service concurred with the Chugach National Forest determination that the proposed action may affect, but is “not likely to adversely affect,” fin whales, Cook Inlet distinct population segment beluga whales, western distinct population segment Steller sea lions, or Mexico or western North Pacific distinct population segment humpback whales. I find that the final land management plan is fully compliant with the Endangered Species Act.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act states that all federal agencies must consult the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service for actions or proposed actions that may adversely affect essential fish habitat. The Act promotes the protection of essential fish habitat through project review, assessment, and mitigation of activities that may adversely affect these habitats.
The environmental impact statement includes an analysis of essential fish habitat to determine if the actions or proposed actions considered in the plan revision would have an adverse effect on essential fish habitat. The analysis concluded that the revised plan does not authorize any specific project or actions that would reduce quality and/or quantity of essential fish habitat or contribute to any effects that may include direct or indirect physical, chemical, or biological alterations of the waters or substrate and loss of, or injury to, benthic organisms, prey species and their habitat, and other ecosystem components. Future project activities designed to implement the final land management plan that may adversely affect essential fish habitat will go through consultation in accordance with the Act. I find that the final land management plan is fully compliant with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

**Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act**

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act requires National Forest System lands to be administered to provide for multiple uses such as recreation, timber, watersheds, wildlife, and fisheries. The final land management plan establishes a strong multiple-use framework by providing plan components related to ecosystem structure, process, and function; wildlife and fisheries; recreation; traditional and cultural resources; forest products; special uses; mining and minerals extraction; and energy transmission and development. I find that the final land management plan is fully compliant with the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act.

**National Environmental Policy Act**

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental and social effects of implementing federal actions. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the Act (40 CFR 1500–1508). These include (1) considering a range of reasonable alternatives, (2) disclosing cumulative effects, (3) insuring the integrated use of the natural and social sciences, (4) considering long-term and short-term effects, and (5) disclosing unavoidable adverse effects.

The final environmental impact statement considers a range of alternatives, including four alternatives considered in detail and four additional alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study (see chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement). Alternatives were developed and revised based on public input and comment, including consultation with Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, State of Alaska, local governments, and other federal agencies. The final environmental impact statement discloses cumulative effects of each alternative by evaluating past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the plan area. Although non-federal lands are outside the scope of this decision, effects from their use have been considered in the environmental impact statement to a degree appropriate for a programmatic environmental analysis document at this scale. The final environmental impact statement also makes use of the best available scientific information. This use has been reviewed by the Pacific Northwest Research Station using a science consistency evaluation process that considered the quality of the information used, how the information was used, and whether risk and uncertainty were acknowledged. The best available scientific literature was used to help estimate environmental consequences.
The final land management plan adopts all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm, including plan components to provide the ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The final land management plan includes a monitoring program and an adaptive management approach to allow flexibility to make needed adjustments over the plan period.

My decision does not directly authorize any ground-disturbing activities or projects; future ground-disturbing activities and projects must be consistent with the final land management plan and are subject to additional site-specific public involvement, environmental analysis, and pre-decisional review processes. Therefore, the final land management plan is fully compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act and Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations.

**National Forest Management Act**

The National Forest Management Act requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. Under the Act, the Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System.

The National Forest Management Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining land management plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a Final Planning Rule for National Forest System land management planning (36 CFR Part 219; refer to the Federal Register at 77 FR 68, pages 21162–21276).

My review of the planning process, the final environmental impact statement, and the information provided in this record of decision (see sections titled “Reasons for the Decision” and “Requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule”) document that the final land management plan and its preparation meet requirements for revising plans under the provisions of the 2012 Planning Rule, and is fully compliant with the National Forest Management Act.

**National Historic Preservation Act**

Alaska’s State Historic Preservation Officer reviewed the draft land management plan and found no potential for the land management plan to affect cultural resources. The State Historic Preservation Officer stated that the revised plan adequately addressed the Forest Service’s responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act and that further consultation on the land management plan was not required, as the land management plan is administrative direction rather than physical alteration of the landscape that could have the potential to affect cultural and historic sites. Therefore, I find that the final land management plan fully complies with the National Historic Preservation Act.

**Executive Orders**

**Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)**

As required by Executive Order 12898, all federal actions must consider potentially disproportionate effects on minority or low-income communities (also known as environmental justice populations). Land management plans are strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. These plans do not create, authorize, or execute any ground-disturbing activity, although they do provide for the consideration of certain types of activities. Future site-specific activities will consider potential disproportionate effects on minority or low-income communities during project planning.
Analysis in the “Social and Economic Contribution” section of the final environmental impact statement did not identify any disproportionate impacts resulting from the proposed management direction for the Chugach National Forest because there is a wide range of opportunities, activities, and services offered. There are no changes to the availability and access to subsistence resources. Therefore, there are no anticipated effects to minority or low-income populations. In addition, collaboration on the final land management plan with local agencies and members of the public did not identify any concerns regarding disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations.

**Floodplains and Wetlands (Executive Orders 11988 and 11990)**

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 require federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, short- and long-term effects resulting from the occupancy and modification of floodplains, and the modification or destruction of wetlands. The final land management plan provides forestwide standards and guidelines for soil and water, wetlands, and riparian areas to minimize effects to floodplains and wetlands. Additionally, project-level analysis for subsequent activities under the final land management plan will be required to demonstrate compliance with the Clean Water Act and State of Alaska water quality standards.

**Safeguarding the Nation from the Impacts of Invasive Species (Executive Orders 13112 and 13751)**

Executive Order 13112 of February 3, 1999 (Invasive Species), called upon executive departments and agencies to take steps to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, and to support efforts to eradicate and control invasive species that are established. Executive Order 13751 amends Executive Order 13112 and directs actions to continue coordinated federal prevention and control efforts related to invasive species. This order maintains the National Invasive Species Council (Council) and the Invasive Species Advisory Committee; expands the membership of the Council; clarifies the operations of the Council; incorporates considerations of human and environmental health, climate change, technological innovation, and other emerging priorities into federal efforts to address invasive species; and strengthens coordinated, cost-efficient federal action.

The final land management plan provides forestwide plan components, including desired conditions, objectives, and guidelines to prevent or minimize the establishment or spread of invasive species. Additionally, project-level analysis for subsequent activities implemented under the final land management plan must be consistent with the final land management plan. The final land management plan includes monitoring questions to track the effectiveness of the plan components related to invasive species.

**Effective Date**

The Chugach National Forest final land management plan will become effective 30 calendar days after publication of the notice of its approval in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.17(a), 2012 Planning Rule). This approval will not occur until the pre-decisional review process (objection process) is complete and a final record of decision is issued.
Administrative Review

The decision to approve the Chugach National Forest final land management plan is subject to the objection process identified in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B. A 60-day objection-filing period begins the day after publication of the notice of objection in the Anchorage Daily News. Individuals or entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan revision during the opportunities for public comment may file objections for Forest Service review prior to the approval of the final record of decision and Regional Forester’s list of species of conservation concern for the Chugach National Forest.

The responsible official who will approve the record of decision and the revised land management plan for the Chugach National Forest is the Forest Supervisor of the Chugach National Forest. Because the Forest Supervisor is the responsible official, the Regional Forester is the reviewing officer for the record of decision and the revised land management plan (36 CFR 219.56(e)(2)).

The responsible official for the Regional Forester species of conservation concern list is the Regional Forester for the Alaska Region. Because the Regional Forester is the responsible official, the Chief of the Forest Service is the reviewing officer for species of conservation concern identification (36 CFR 219.56(e)(2)).

Objections, including attachments, must be filed within 60 days of the publication date of the legal notice published in the newspaper of record, the Anchorage Daily. Objections, including attachments, received after the 60-day objection period will not be considered. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object to this project should not rely upon dates or time frame information provided by any other source. It is the responsibility of the objector to ensure that the reviewing officer receives the objection in a timely manner. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the objection-filing period.

Please be explicit as to whether the objection is for the Chugach National Forest final land management plan or the Chugach National Forest species of conservation concern.

Objections must be submitted to the Objection Reviewing Officer by one of the following methods:

- Electronically to the Objection Reviewing Officer via the CARA objection web form: https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=40816. Electronic submissions must be submitted in a format (Word, PDF, or Rich Text) that is readable and searchable with optical character recognition software. An automated response will confirm that the electronic objection was received.

- Via regular mail, carrier, or hand delivery to the following address: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Objection Reviewing Officer, Alaska Region, 709 W. 9th Street, Juneau, AK 99801, or P.O. Box 21628, Juneau, AK 99801. Note that the office hours for submitting a hand-delivered objection are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Alaska Time, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

- Via fax to (907) 586-7840. Faxes must be addressed to “Objection Reviewing Officer.” The fax coversheet should specify the number of pages being submitted.

- Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.
An objection must include the following (36 CFR 219.54(c)):

1. The objector’s name and address along with a telephone number or email address if available—in cases where no identifiable name is attached to an objection, the Forest Service will attempt to verify the identity of the objector to confirm objection eligibility;

2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the objection);

3. Identification of the lead objector when multiple names are listed on an objection. The Forest Service will communicate to all parties to an objection through the lead objector. Verification of the identity of the lead objector must also be provided if requested;

4. The name of the land management plan revision or Regional Forester’s list of species of conservation concern being objected to, and the name and title of the responsible official;

5. A statement of the issues and/or parts of the land management plan revision or Regional Forester’s list of species of conservation concern to which the objection applies;

6. A concise statement explaining the objection and suggesting how the draft record of decision may be improved. If the objector believes that the plan revision or Regional Forester’s list of species of conservation concern is inconsistent with law, regulation, or policy, an explanation should be included;

7. A statement that demonstrates the link between the objector’s prior substantive formal comments and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment; and

8. Documents referenced in the objection must be included with the objection (include the document, web link to document, or both), except for the following list of items that may be referenced by including the name, date, page number (where applicable), and relevant section of the cited document.

a. All or any part of a federal law or regulation,

b. Forest Service Directive System documents and land management plans or other published Forest Service documents,

c. Documents referenced by the Forest Service in the planning documentation related to the proposal subject to objection, and

d. Formal comments previously provided to the Forest Service by the objector during the plan amendment comment period.

Plan Implementation

Existing Authorizations

Authorizations for occupancy and use made before this land management plan approval may proceed unchanged until time of reauthorization. At time of reauthorization, all permits, contracts, and other authorizing instruments must be made consistent with the final land management plan, subject to existing valid rights, as provided at 36 CFR 219.15(d).
Project Consistency

As required by National Forest Management Act and the 2012 Planning Rule, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of this land management plan must be consistent with the applicable plan components (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) as described at 36 CFR 219.15.

Previously approved and ongoing projects and activities, where initiation date preceded approval of the final land management plan, are not required to meet the direction of the final land management plan and will remain consistent with the direction in the 2002 land management plan revision, as amended.

With the exception of previously approved and ongoing projects mentioned in the paragraph above, projects and activities authorized after approval of the final land management plan must be consistent with the plan components of the final land management plan. After the effective date of the final land management plan, all project or activity approval documents prepared will describe how the project or activity is consistent with the applicable plan components. When a proposed project or activity would not be consistent with the applicable plan components, the responsible official shall take one of the following steps, subject to valid existing rights:

1. Modify the proposed project or activity to make it consistent with the applicable plan components;
2. Reject the proposal or terminate the project or activity;
3. Amend the plan so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended;
4. Amend the plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended. This amendment may be limited to apply only to the project or activity.

Resource plans developed by the Chugach National Forest (such as the travel management plan) that apply to the resources or land areas within the plan area must be consistent with the plan components of the final land management plan. Resource plans developed prior to this decision must be evaluated for consistency with the final land management plan and updated if necessary to be consistent with the final land management plan. Updates to the travel management plan, or any other resource plan, will tier to the goals, desired conditions, and objectives of the final land management plan.

Monitoring Program

The final land management plan includes a plan monitoring program (see appendix A of the final land management plan), as required by the 2012 planning rule. Within this program, monitoring questions address each of the eight required monitoring categories and include associated indicators. Every monitoring question links to one or more plan components, though not every plan component has a corresponding monitoring question.

A separate monitoring guide will be developed to provide more detailed information on the monitoring questions and their indicators, frequency and reliability, data sources, storage and cost. While biennial evaluations will be completed, not all monitoring questions are expected to be evaluated biennially.
This monitoring program is not intended to encompass all monitoring, inventorying, and data-gathering activities undertaken on the Chugach National Forest, nor is it intended to limit monitoring to just the questions and indicators listed in appendix A of the final land management plan. Consideration and coordination with broader scale monitoring strategies adopted by the Regional Forester, multi-party monitoring collaboration, and cooperation with State and Private Forestry as well as Research and Development mission areas will increase efficiencies and help track changing conditions beyond the Chugach National Forest boundaries. In addition, project and activity monitoring may be used to gather information for the plan monitoring program if it will provide relevant information to inform adaptive management.

Maintaining the Plan

A land management plan is an integral part of an adaptive management cycle including assessment, plan revision or amendment, and monitoring. This adaptive management cycle will enable the Chugach National Forest to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information, such as that obtained through research and scientific findings. The final land management plan monitoring program is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle.

A land management plan may be amended at any time based on a preliminary identification of the need to change the plan. The preliminary identification of the need to change the plan may be based on a new assessment, land management plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information, changed conditions, or changed circumstances. The amendment and administrative change process is described at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(2) of the 2012 Planning Rule.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this draft decision or the objection process, please contact: Sue Jennings, Revision Team Leader, 161 East 1st Ave., Door 8, Anchorage, AK 99501; (907) 789-6238; susan.jennings@usda.gov.

Signature and Date

___________________________   ________________
[JEFF E. SCHRAMM]   DATE
Forest Supervisor
Chugach National Forest
Appendix
The appendix to the record of decision consists of the following maps:

- Record of Decision – Wilderness Recommendation
- Record of Decision – Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
- Record of Decision – Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Recommendation
Map 1. Record of decision – wilderness recommendation
Map 2. Record of decision – recreation opportunity spectrum
Map 3. Record of decision – wild, scenic, and recreational rivers recommendation