Raven’s Roost Cabin Replacement Project

Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
For More Information Contact:

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Dear Interested Individuals, Agencies and Organizations:

I have released the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Decision Notice (DN) for the Raven’s Roost Cabin Replacement project on the Petersburg Ranger District, Tongass National Forest. This project is subject to the pre-decisional Administrative Review Process (Objection Process) pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subparts A and B. The EA and draft DN are available online at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57917. These documents are also available for review at the Petersburg District office, however we are currently limiting our walk-in access. If you would like to set up an appointment to review these documents, please call Ted Sandhofer at 907-772-3871.

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with 36 CFR 218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service. Send objections to: M. Earl Stewart, Reviewing Officer, Tongass National Forest, Federal Building, 648 Mission Street, Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591, 907-228-6301 (fax), objections-alaska-tongass@usda.gov. Hand-delivered objections are being accepted by appointment only; to schedule hand-delivery contact Frank Sherman at 907-617-3222. Electronically filed objections may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html).

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Petersburg Pilot. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

At a minimum, an objection must include the following (36 CFR 218.8(d)):

1) The objector’s name and address, with a telephone number, if available;

2) A signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection);

3) When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request);
4) The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;

5) A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and

6) A statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection.

Incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in 36 CFR 218.8(b). It is the objector’s responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to 36 CFR 218.9. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

I want to thank those of you who took time to review and comment on this project. For additional information, please contact: Victoria Houser, Project Leader, at 907-874-7560 or victoria.houser@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

TED SANDHOFER
District Ranger
Decision

Based upon my review of the Environmental Assessment (EA), a comment received during the public comment period, and documentation included in the project record, I intend to select the Proposed Action as the Selected Alternative, including all project design elements described in the EA.

1. Construct an ADA-compliant cabin, deck, outhouse, and route between the cabin and outhouse. The proposed site is on Raven’s Ridge, approximately 2.5 trail miles from Petersburg. Proposal details include:

   - Creating a similar footprint as the existing cabin site with gravel trails radiating out to the propane tank and the outhouse gravel pads, and the trail system, roughly 0.25 acre (1,100 square feet) of disturbance;
   
   - Assembling a single-story (no loft) pre-engineered structure (16-foot by 20-foot cabin kit) with a covered deck constructed of milled timber with glulam timber foundation beams that can accommodate six to eight persons;
   
   - Installing a direct-vent propane heater fueled by a 500-gallon tank for primary heat source;
   
   - Preparing the cabin site, which includes removing the peat, digging holes for the pilings, and pouring the concrete pilings on site; and
   
   - Mobilizing materials and equipment to the site via helicopter from the nearby Petersburg airport.

2. Remove the existing Raven’s Roost public use cabin and outhouse and restore the site. Details include:

   - Salvaging some parts of the cabin (may include such items as windows and large timbers) and demolishing the remainder. Materials will be removed from the site and transported to Petersburg by helicopter.
   
   - Restoring approximately 0.1 acre (500 square feet) of disturbed, compacted peat where needed by filling and leveling depressions, and naturalizing with native plants and soil.
Decision Rationale

It is my goal to continue to provide high quality and diverse recreation experiences on the Petersburg Ranger District. The Selected Alternative is consistent with this goal, and reflects my commitment to providing facilities that meet the needs of a diverse user group, are sustainable, and provide for the health and safety of all users.

The Selected Alternative responds to Forest Plan goals and objectives to enhance recreation facilities in locations where they are supported by known use, to remove facilities no longer affordable and to provide for the health and safety of all Forest users (Forest Plan, Recreation Goals and Objectives, p. 2-4). My decision to replace the Raven’s Roost Cabin supports the Tongass National Forest Sustainable Cabin Strategy to build, relocate, and remove cabins to increase public access and use, while reducing the cabin program’s operations and maintenance costs.

The Selected Alternative achieves the Purpose and Need of this project by reducing deferred cabin maintenance costs, providing a site closer to the community of Petersburg, providing an ADA-compliant recreation facility that will benefit a more-diverse user group, and retaining a public use cabin on the District that is accessible by means other than boat or plane.

Public Involvement

In January of 2018, the Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts distributed a letter, questionnaire and map to approximately 1,100 individuals, organizations and agencies seeking ideas for projects on National Forest System and adjacent lands. The letter, questionnaire and map were publicized in local newspapers (Petersburg Pilot and Wrangell Sentinel), on public radio stations KFSK (Petersburg), KSTK (Wrangell) and KCAW (Sitka but within the broadcast area for Kake), and on the Tongass webpage.

A brief project description of the Raven’s Roost Cabin Replacement project was included on the Preliminary List of Activities for Proposal and Review in 2020 as part of the Central Tongass Project and on a map posted to the Central Tongass Project webpage in July 2019. With the timing of a decision on the Central Tongass Project uncertain, the Raven’s Roost Cabin Replacement project was proposed separately and was listed on the Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in March 2020.

In April, the Forest Service mailed consultation letters to the local tribal agencies and provided a combined scoping and 30-day comment period (EA, pp. 12-13). In addition, the Forest Service emailed a link to an electronic copy of the scoping letter to businesses, organizations and individuals (714 emails sent) via the GovDelivery system and mailed paper copies of the scoping letter as requested (19 letters mailed).

The 30-day comment period on the proposal was advertised in the Petersburg Pilot, the newspaper of record, on April 2nd, and listed on the local radio station online community calendar for the duration of the comment period. The radio station (KFSK) also provided a public service announcement that included the start of the comment period and contacts for questions and additional information.
The Forest Service received one comment during the combined scoping and 30-day comment period from the Petersburg Indian Association who wrote in support the proposal.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment
I have reviewed the Forest Plan and have concluded that the Proposed Action is consistent with applicable direction in the Forest Plan in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Specifically, the Proposed Action is consistent with applicable plan direction in the Municipal Watershed Land Use Designation (LUD) in Chapter 3, Management Prescriptions, of the Forest Plan (Forest Plan, pp. 3-51 to 3-57).

ANILCA Section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding
The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. There is no documented or reported subsistence use that would be restricted as a result of this decision. For this reason, the Selected Alternative would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other resources.

Endangered Species Act of 1973
No plants or animals federally listed or proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or animals federally listed or proposed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service are known or suspected to occur in the project area; therefore, this activity will have “No Effect” to federally listed threatened and endangered species.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act includes locating, inventorying and nominating all cultural sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. There are no known sites in the Area of Potential Effect and the project area is located in the low probability zone for cultural resources. Therefore, the Forest Service has made a determination of No Historic Properties Affected with project implementation.

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)
This activity will not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990.

Recreational Fisheries (E.O. 12962)
Federal agencies are required, to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, and in cooperation with States and Tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities. As required by this Order, I have evaluated the effects of this action on aquatic systems and recreational fisheries and documented those effects relative to the purpose of this order. Since there are no effects to fisheries resources within the project area there will be no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts related to this Order.
Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)
I have determined that in accordance with Executive Order 12898 this project does not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

Invasive Species (E.O. 13112)
An invasive plant risk assessment has been completed for this project, the findings and recommendations of which are incorporated into project design. Project design features in the EA (pp. 4 and 5) include mitigation measures to reduce the potential for introduction and spread of invasive species.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
Section 305(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for actions that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). Due to the lack of fish and fish habitat within the project area, this consultation was not initiated. It is my determination that implementing the Proposed Action would have no adverse effects to EFH.

Finding of No Significant Impact
After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Context
The relevant effects addressed in the EA are defined to the analysis areas for each resource at an appropriate scale for the Proposed Action. All activities described in the EA are consistent with applicable Forest Plan direction. Actions described in the Proposed Action are similar to other cabin construction projects that have occurred or are occurring on the Tongass National Forest.

The project area is within the Petersburg Ranger District on the Tongass National Forest. It consists of two sites on Mitkof Island both on Ravens Ridge above the Petersburg, Alaska airport. Both sites have a similar footprint of less than 0.5 acre of disturbance – development at the new cabin site and decommissioning and rehabilitation at the existing cabin site.

The project’s scale and location limits its effects on the natural resource values and uses, and does not pose significant short- or long-term effects. Forest Plan direction and design features included in the Proposed Action mitigate impacts to the extent that impacts to some resources are negligible (see Environmental Effects section of the EA).

Intensity
Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of the EA and the documentation in the project record. I have taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of
site conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.**

Effects of the Proposed Action were analyzed and disclosed by resource specialists at spatial and temporal scales appropriate to that resource. The EA does not identify any adverse or beneficial effects significant in context or intensity to warrant an EIS for this project.

2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.**

Cabin replacements have been implemented on the Forest with no impacts to public health or safety, and no circumstances or conditions exist unique to the Proposed Action that would indicate unusual or substantial risks. No concerns were raised during the public scoping period, and contract measures will be enforced during implementation to minimize conflicts with recreation users. In the long-term, replacing the cabin will improve the health and safety of users by increasing ease of public access since the new cabin site is closer to Petersburg and by providing a cabin and associated structure that is more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

The Forest Service has made the determination of No Historic Properties Affected (EA, p. 12).

No parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or areas of critical ecological importance lie within the project area.

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

I have reviewed the comment received during the scoping comment period for the proposed project, the analysis documented in the EA, and the information in the project record. Based on the level of public outreach, the limited and localized response, and the lack of scientific controversy over the impacts of this project, I have determined it is unlikely the effects to the human environment from implementing the Proposed Action would be highly controversial.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**

The Forest Service has considerable experience with the activities included in the Proposed Action. None of the activities are new or unique, and all are reasonably predictable and well understood. Based on the analysis in the EA, I believe the possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unknown risks.
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**

The scope of my decision is consistent with the Forest Plan and limited to a localized action to be undertaken over a specified time period. The effects of the Proposed Action were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions because the action proposed – decommissioning an existing cabin and replacing with a new one – has already occurred on the Petersburg Ranger District without significant effects.

Any future action(s) not covered by this project, whether related to the actions in this project or not, will consider all relevant scientific, site-specific information available at that time. Additionally future actions will be subject to the appropriate environmental analysis that considers the direct and indirect effects, and cumulative effects of all other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**

I have determined the Proposed Action will have individually insignificant impacts and cumulatively insignificant impacts as they relate to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions (see the cumulative effects analysis for all resources in the Environmental Impacts section of the EA).

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. A cultural resource investigation was initiated to meet the regulations (36 CFR 800) implementing Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act, and the Forest Service made a determination of No Historic Properties Affected (EA, p. 12).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.**

I have determined no significant impacts would occur that adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat given that no plants or animals federally listed or proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or animals federally listed or proposed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service are known or suspected to occur in the project area (EA, p. 11).

10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

The action does not violate any Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for protection of the environment. The analysis and proposed implementation complies with all
applicable Federal, State, local laws and regulations, and is consistent with policy pertaining to management of National Forest resources. The Proposed Action follows Best Management Practices and includes design features to avoid, minimize, and protect the environment.

**Objection Opportunities**

After this draft Decision Notice, FONSI, and EA are made available to the public, a legal notice announcing the objection period for this project will be published in the *Petersburg Pilot*, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the *Petersburg Pilot* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection of this project. Those wishing to object to this proposed project should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with 36 CFR 218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted, timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless the issues are based on new information arising after designated comment opportunities. Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual. Objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. If an objection is submitted on behalf of a number of individuals or organizations, each individual or organization listed must meet the eligibility requirement (36 CFR 218.7). Names and addresses of objectors will become part of the public record.

The objection must be in writing and meet the content requirements at 36 CFR 218.8(d). Written objections, including any attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the publication date of the legal notice in the *Petersburg Pilot*.

Objections must be sent to:

M. Earl Stewart  
Federal Building, 648 Mission Street, Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591  
907-228-6301 (fax)  
objections-alaska-tongass@usda.gov

Hand-delivered objections are being accepted by appointment only; to schedule hand-delivery contact Frank Sherman at 907-617-3222. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an email message, (.pdf), plain text format (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). It is the responsibility of objectors to ensure that their objection is received in a timely manner (36 CFR 218.9).

**Implementation Date**

As per 36 CFR 218.12(c)(2), if no objection is received within the objection filing period, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection-filing period. If an objection is filed, this decision cannot be signed or implemented until the Reviewing Officer has responded in writing to all pending objections and any concerns or instructions identified by the Reviewing Officer have been addressed.
Contact
For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Ted Sandhofer, District Ranger, PO Box 1328, Petersburg, AK 99833, 907-772-3871 (phone), 907-722-5995 (fax),
ted.sandhofer@usda.gov.