

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

1500 W Benson Boulevard
Anchorage AK 99503
907-269-0181



State Capitol
Juneau AK 99801-1182
907-465-4843
800-892-4843

North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senate Resources Committee Chair

October 31, 2018

Chugach National Forest's Supervisor's Office
Attn: Draft Land Management Plan
161 East 1st Ave., Door 8
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan

Honorable Sir or Madam:

I write you in my capacity as the Chair of the Alaska Senate Resources Committee. This Committee for the past six years engaged in deep deliberations on the subject of Alaska's state and federal public lands, the access to those lands, and the uses allowed on those lands. How our federal public lands are managed, and which groups receive access and which groups are restricted or denied access, is important to my colleagues and myself. It is from that vantage that I offer comments on the Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan's Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The Chugach National Forest (CNF) is this country's second largest national forest in the country. As the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) states, nearly 99% of the CNF's land limits human interaction with the environment. A national forest of over 5 million acres with tracts abutting Alaska's major population centers has a significantly limited amount of frontcountry management designated.

Additionally, the CNF has significant mineral and other mining potential, along with the prospect of commercial timber opportunities. These other allowable uses have been significantly curtailed through past actions, not least of which was the inclusion of the CNF into the Forest Service's Inventoried Roadless Areas.

The proposed Land Management Plan and accompanying DEIS determined further study of timber harvests did not rise to the level of being a significant issue, warranting further review. However, I respectfully suggest that reviewing the inventory of the CNF again, and in particular the tracts in the Seward and Glacier Ranger Districts, as potential for commercial opportunities. Alaska has a unique role to contribute in promoting sustainable forest products, particularly with the state's location vis-à-vis the Pacific Rim markets.

Regarding the alternatives in the DEIS, I respectfully take exception with Alternative C, which would reduce the access to the CNF by motorized conveyance. Alaska has a vibrant and enthusiastic snowmachine community, and for many, motorized conveyance is the only means of experiencing the countryside in the wintertime. As previously noted, virtually the entire CNF is roadless and essentially impassable to motorized travel.

The majority of motorized transportation occurs in the Seward and Glacier Districts, from the communities within and near the CNF. Moreover, the transportation corridors in the Seward and Glacier Districts contain old mining and prospector trails, including RS2477 easements in dispute with the State of Alaska. Whereas the eastern side of Prince William Sound has limited to no legacy trails, the western side of the sound has a historical presence of motorized and commercial conveyance through the lands. Any restriction on these portions of the CNF would be new restrictions of access by the public.

I have received communications from constituents concerned about their access to national forest lands being curtailed. Alternative B, which builds upon the status quo and attempts to balance the interest of stakeholder groups, is a comparatively more acceptable option.

Alaskans have already acceded to withdrawals of public lands from more intensive use through legislation such as the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). One of the clauses in ANILCA was that further attempt to pull public lands away from multiple use into a de jure or de facto wilderness state would cease. This is referred colloquially as the 'no more clause.' Alternative C to many of my constituents, and my mind, appears to undermine this intent, and keep what make Alaska special out of reach of ordinary Alaskans.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy Giessel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cathy" and last name "Giessel" clearly legible.

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Alaska Senate Resources Committee