

FOREST PROTECTION

Goal

Protect forest resources from wildfire, insects, disease, and other destructive agents. Wildland fire protection is managed under an interagency management agreement, the Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Agreement. The USDA Forest Service, Tongass National Forest, has been the protecting agency for the protection area covering the Forest since 2017. The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan identifies the appropriate level of wildland fire suppression for all lands in Alaska. The suppression duties will be performed by the federal agency offices based in Juneau and across the Tongass. Cooperation and support from the Division of Forestry & Fire Protection in a successful wildfire suppression program will include coordination of wildfire suppression tactics, provision of suppression supplies and equipment, and following the interagency agreements. The DFFP and USDA Forest Service will review and may modify the suppression agreement annually to improve wildland fire suppression actions in the Forest.

Management Guidelines

The Forest Resources and Practices Act provides guidance for the protection policy in the Forest. The Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan provides additional policy direction for managing suppression actions in the Forest. These documents contain requirements and/or guidelines concerning the following:

- Insect and Disease Control
- Burn Permits
- Emergency Closure
- Equipment for Operations

1. Forest Health Management

Forest health issues can include any insect, disease, or competing vegetation that is detrimental to the productivity of the forest.

- A. Methods. The primary approach to pest control in the Forest will be prevention assisted by suppression. Prevention will consist of stand manipulation (i.e. pre-commercial thinning, pruning, windthrow salvage, etc.) to maximize natural mortality of insect pests and decrease the likelihood of disease or competing vegetation spread, thereby minimizing the need for suppression. However, other direct management measures may be required in areas where failure to mitigate impacts could result in loss of resource values.

- B. Pesticides. Herbicides will not be used as a means of eliminating competing vegetation in the Forest, however consideration of herbicide use to prevent spread of invasive species along forest roads will be allowed. Approval of the use of herbicides along the Forest road system will be made in consultation with ADFG and DEC, with concurrence of the proposed application before use.

Other pesticides such as insecticides or fungicides may not be used in the Forest.¹ Exceptions are allowed only if recommended, supported by other agencies with the expertise and authority to approve treatments, and if benefits to forest health and/or the public can be realized.

Any pesticides approved for application in the Forest must be applied in accordance with all labeling and applicable regulations.

- C. Monitoring. An annual detection survey will be conducted by DFFP in cooperation with the USFS to determine current insect and disease activity in the Forest and throughout the region.
- D. Insect Outbreaks. In the 1980's and 90's, Sitka Spruce trees in the Chilkat Valley were impacted by a spruce beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*) outbreak. This outbreak affected approximately 40,000 acres with stand impacts have ranging from 100 percent mortality to only 20 percent loss of the mature spruce component normally present in Forest stands. Spruce beetle is common in Alaska's forest environments and at endemic levels provide background level mortality of stressed or damaged trees. Outbreaks of this insect, though, can result in dramatic impacts to the Sitka Spruce across the Forest. Similarly, outbreaks of defoliating insects such as the western blackheaded budworm can affect the productivity of the hemlocks and occasionally spruce, they defoliate. DFFP, in cooperation with the USFS, monitors these and other insect populations to help detect outbreaks and address and evaluate forest conditions before, during, and after the outbreak. Many forest insect populations in Alaska experience periodic or cyclical outbreak levels with varying durations and impacts across the landscape over time.
- E. Cooperative Research. The DFFP will work with other agencies and landowners to assess forest resource impacts and develop improved control techniques for insects, diseases, and competing vegetation. This collaborative effort may include

¹ The use of semiochemicals (insect- or tree-generated scents used in attracting or repelling insects) in monitoring or investigating forest insect populations, is allowed within this provision.

development of studies, identification of areas impacted, collection of data, and providing support for other agencies leading research projects in the Forest.

2. Fire Management

- A. Forest Fire Protection. DFFP will participate in interagency wildland fire management planning processes to ensure fire management options for the Forest reflect current physical developments, timber assets, and other needs.
- B. Prescribed Burning. DFFP will use prescribed fire as a management tool and apply it in a manner consistent with existing policy and procedures to achieve resource management objectives.
- C. Fire Prevention. DFFP will provide leadership support of prevention activities throughout the forest as needed and in cooperation with Federal agencies assigned suppression duties.

3. Climate-Adapted Forest Management

- A. Sustained Yield. Active, sustainable forest management represents a critical opportunity for landscape-scale adaptation to environmental changes, including Alaska's changing climate. The DFFP will manage the Forest to maintain access to the resources and ecosystem services provided by the Forest for the Alaskan public now and for future generations.
- B. Adaptive Management. The DFFP implements an adaptive management framework for forest management within HSFRMA. Using the best available science and monitoring outcomes of current practices, managing foresters plan forest management activities with considerations to generational outcomes and develop forest management strategies that reflect the conditions observed on the landscape. FRPA-required implementation and effectiveness monitoring informs DFFP responses to unpredictable outcomes and documents the decision process for future learning. Other natural resource and economic fields may be affected by rapid or unpredictable environmental change, which may reveal opportunities for forestry practices or forest products to offer solutions.
- C. Active Forest Management. DFFP uses active forest management to encourage diversity of age, species, and structural composition within the Forest to support healthy and resilient forest stands.
- D. Providing locally sourced forest products. In serving the DFFP mission, the Division works to provide forest resources to Alaska to support Alaskans' quality of life. The Forest is managed to provide timber, food, recreation opportunities, jobs, and other resources to local communities and the residents of Alaska. The

DFFP has a duty to make timber resources available to Alaskans from state-managed lands, where stringent environmental regulations are enforced.

- E. Providing for non-timber values. A viable timber harvest program inherently involves maintaining an abundance of healthy, productive forest lands. Timber harvest shall be designed to support regeneration of forests and to perpetuate the many non-timber values associated with forested lands.

4. Other Guidelines for Forest Protection

Several guidelines in this chapter may affect forest protection. For details of those guidelines, see the following sections of this chapter:

- Fish and Wildlife
- Forest timber Resources
- Transportation