Easement Application for Zero Lake Road Network

Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection

Development plan

Purpose

The purpose of this application is to secure a public access easement across state land to support ongoing forest management by the Division of Forestry & Fire Protection (DFFP) on lands classified for forestry, consistent with the state's statutory mandate for multiple-use management. The proposed easement extends from the terminus of the existing platted right-of-way at the northern boundary of Section 9, Township 18 North, Range 3 West, Seward Meridian, and incorporates the segments of the Zero Lake Road system constructed during previous timber sales. Formalizing this access will provide durable legal access for future timber sales, silvicultural treatments, and related resource management, as well as for other authorized public uses.

Use

The Zero Lake Road network is an important asset for DFFP as it provides established access to forest resources near existing transportation infrastructure. Since the 1980's, this area has increasingly supported public firewood cutting opportunities and commercial timber operations. Access for emergency response, including wildland fire suppression, is another asset this road system provides.

Beyond DFFP use, this road system is regularly used by the public to access an established network of regional trails supporting multiple forms of recreation and subsistence use, as well as training grounds for the local mushing community. Securing access to these lands ensures DFFP can continue to maintain and enhance these values through active management.

Legal Description

The general location of this proposal is the forest classified lands north of Houston, Alaska, locally referred to as the Zero Lake area. In the Southeast Susitna Area Plan, the forest units are called Houston 01, 06, 03, 02 and include the Mike Peacock Experimental Forest. The roads included in this application, shown in the attached map, are found in S18N3W Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 16 and S18N2W Sections 9,10,16,17, and S19N3W Sections 31, 32. Cumulative length of the easement applied for is approximately 89,804 feet (17 miles), the requested total width is 200 feet.

Terrain and Ground Cover

Terrain consists of rolling topography, with existing roads leveraging high ground to avoid depressions and poorly drained areas. Ground cover in the easement application area is established roadbed, active roads surfaced with compacted gravel, and inactive roads with some potential ingrowth of early succession vegetation. Vegetation on the surrounding landscape consists of a mixed birch-spruce forest type with rusty menziesia, blueberry, cranberry, fireweed, mixed birch-spruce regeneration, and a variety of grasses, moss and lichen making up the groundcovers.

Access

The existing road network connects to the Parks Highway at milepost 59. Access to the easternmost road segment is from W. Bernie Circle (N Nightfall). Access off the Parks Highway sees the heaviest traffic, while the east access point is primarily used by the local neighborhood.

The existing road consists of a gravel surface constructed on natural subgrade with ditching and culverts installed where needed to support adequate drainage. Current users access this area with passenger cars and trucks, atv/utv, snowmachine, dogsled, bikes and by foot. Timber operators accessing the area use some of the means of access listed above with the additional use of log trucks and semis/trailers to haul equipment to and from timber operations. Graders, dozers, compactors and excavators may be used for road work.

Buildings and Other Structures

No construction of buildings or other structures is proposed in this application.

Power Source

Utility and power do not extend beyond the neighboring residential areas and DFFP has no plans to bring them into the unit.

Waste Types, Waste Sources, and Disposal Methods

Generation and disposal of waste is not anticipated.

Hazardous Substances

No toxic or hazardous materials will be generated or disposed of on-site, however, hydrocarbons associated with equipment needed for timber harvest and forest management operations and road construction or maintenance, such as gasoline/saw mix, diesel fuel, bar oil, hydraulic oil, coolant and transmission fluid will be present while the equipment is on-site. Quantities of these fluids vary by equipment type and size and will be contained in/on the equipment. No bulk tanks

or long-term storage is anticipated with this proposal, however, the use and transport of small quantities of those fluids in manufacturer-provided containers to maintain fluid levels in equipment used in associating with road work or forest management is anticipated. Road maintenance and timber operators will be asked to use drip pans or other means to contain drips/leaks from equipment, as appropriate.

Water Supply

Water use associated with this project will be limited to dust control during road maintenance. Water used for these purposes will be hauled from offsite filling stations. Generation and disposal of wastewater is not anticipated.

Parking and Equipment

Equipment associated with road construction and maintenance will likely remain near the worksite during operations, but no long-term parking is anticipated. Logging equipment, including harvesters, skidders, log trucks will be transported to the logging site and remain within the timber sale boundaries during harvest operations and may remain on-site for the duration of the contract, which could be up to five years.

Other Uses

Recreational use usually consists of day trips, however, during hunting season, longer stays are expected, but is expected to align with generally allowed uses on state land. Parking is available at both access points, with more developed facilities on Borough land at the west access point.

Maintenance and Operations

The Zero Lake Road mainline and the spur roads included in this application are already constructed and in use, receiving periodic maintenance to maintain the gravel running surface, sight lines and proper drainage. Road maintenance will be completed by DFFP or by contract with a local vendor.

Displaced soil and vegetation will remain on-site and reused to the greatest extent possible. Unused material will be distributed in a manner that protects water quality and minimizes adverse impacts to untouched vegetation.

Currently no additional construction is planned. Additional roads may be proposed in the future as forest management activity dictates, at which time DFFP will request an expansion of the easement.