

**STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY**



**SOUTHERN SOUTHEAST AREA FORESTRY
PRELIMINARY BEST INTEREST FINDING AND
DECISION FOR
COFFMAN COVE
SSE-1336-K**

DECEMBER 11, 2014

I. PROPOSED ACTION

The Division of Forestry (DOF) is proposing to offer for sale approximately 1,045 acres of mature old growth and 583 acres of commercial second growth composed of western hemlock, Sitka spruce, western red cedar and yellow from state lands on Prince of Wales (POW) Island, approximately 1 mile south of the City of Coffman Cove (see Attachment A, Harvest Area Map). Initially a small portion, 412 acres of old growth, will be offered and the remaining 1,216 acres composed of old growth and second growth will be offered for sale at a later date to meet market demands while complying with State regulations. The initial volume to be offered totals approximately 7,177 thousand board feet (MBF) and the later volume totals 18,240 MBF. The DOF would sell the timber as multiple negotiated sales under provisions of AS 38.05.115, AS 38.05.118 and/or AS 38.05.123.

The management objectives for the proposed timber sales are:

1. To follow the Division of Natural Resources' (DNR or Division) constitutional mandate to encourage the development of the State's renewable resources, making them available for maximum use consistent with the public interest.
2. To help the State's economy by providing royalties to the State in the form of Stumpage receipts, an infusion to the State's economy through wages, purchases, jobs, and business.
3. To help the local economy of the communities within southern Southeast Alaska.
4. To improve forest growth and vigor by harvesting and replacing over-mature stands with new healthy stands of regrowth.

II. STATUTORY AND REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The Division is taking this action under the authority of

- AS 38.05.035(e) Best Interest Finding;
- AS 38.05.110-120 and 11 AAC 71, Timber Sale Statutes and Regulations; and
- AS 41.17.010-950 and 11 AAC 95 Forest Resources and Practices Statutes and Regulations.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

The Division will maintain an administrative record regarding the decision of whether or not to proceed with the action as proposed. This record will be maintained at the DOF's Southern Southeast Area Office filed as SSE-1336-K.

IV. SCOPE OF DECISION

This Preliminary Best Interest Finding (PBIF) is the first part of step three of a six-step process to design, sell, and administer timber sales. This PBIF covers the sale of approximately 1,045 acres of mature old growth forest and 583 acres of second growth composed of western hemlock, Sitka spruce, western red cedar and yellow cedar on state land within the perimeter of the 4,932 acre project area (see Attachment A, Harvest Area Map and Attachment B, Land Use Map). The following list summarizes the overall process:

Step 1: Regional Planning. The Department of Natural Resources develops area plans and state forest management plans to designate appropriate uses for state land, classify the land accordingly, and establish management guidelines for multiple use. These plans determine where timber sales are an allowed use, and what other uses must be considered when designing and implementing sales. Subsequent land use decisions must be consistent with the area plans. The area in this PBIF is covered by the Prince of Wales Island Area Plan. The finding also considers the Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. There are no Community Wildfire Protection Plans in this area. 1,366 acres of the proposed harvest area is within jurisdictional boundary of the city of Coffman Cove, 262 acres of the proposed harvest area is not within the city of Coffman Cove.

Step 2: Best Interest Finding. A best interest finding is the decision document that:

- Establishes the overall area within which the timber sale may occur,
- Determines the amount of timber that will be offered for sale and the duration of the sale,
- Sets the overall harvest and reforestation strategy for the sale area,
- Determines whether the sale proposal complies with the Constitutional requirement to manage for sustained yield by evaluating the amount of timber in the sale and the annual allowable cut for the affected area,
- Selects the appropriate method of sale (i.e., competitive or negotiated sale), and
- Determines the appraisal method that will be used to determine the sale price.

The Preliminary Best Interest Finding is intended to provide sufficient information for reviewers to ensure that the best interest of the State will be served by the proposed action.

After public and agency review of the PBIF, the DOF will review comments, make changes as appropriate, and issue a final Best Interest Finding (BIF). The DOF must adopt a final BIF before selling timber. A person affected by the final decision who provided timely written comment or public hearing testimony on the preliminary decision may appeal it, in accordance with 11 AAC 02.

Step 3: Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales (AS 38.05.113). The Southern Southeast Area office prepares a Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales (FYSTS) every other year. The Schedule identifies proposed sales, including their location, volume, and main access routes. The Five-year Schedules is a scoping document that provides an opportunity for public, agency, and industry to identify potential issues and areas of interest for further consideration in the Forest Land Use Plan. Proposed timber sales within the area covered by this PBIF must appear in at least one of the two Five-year Schedules preceding the sale. The sale area was within 2013-2017 Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales.

Step 4: Forest Land Use Plans (AS 38.05.112). Prior to authorizing harvest of timber on any area greater than 10 acres, the DOF must adopt a site-specific Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for the harvest area. The DOF will prepare FLUPs for harvest areas within the overall sale area covered by this best interest finding. FLUPs specify the site, size, timing, and harvest methods for harvest unit within the sale area. FLUPs also address site-specific requirements for access construction and maintenance, reforestation, and multiple use management. Draft FLUPs will be based on additional field work, agency and community consultation, and site-specific analyses by the DOF, and will be subject to public and agency review.

Step 5: Timber Sales and Contracts. Following adoption of the final best interest finding, the DOF will offer the timber for sale by auctioning competitive sales and/or negotiating some sales with pur-

chasers. The contract will include stipulations to ensure compliance with the best interest finding, FLUP, and statutory requirements.

Step 6: Sale Administration. The DOF administers timber sales and conducts field inspections to ensure compliance with the final best interest finding, FLUP, timber sale contract, and applicable laws, including the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AFRPA) and regulations (AS 41.17 and 11 AAC 95), and forest management statutes and regulations in AS 38.05 and 11 AAC 71.

V. PROJECT LOCATION, LAND STATUS, AND DESCRIPTION

A. Location

The timber sale area is found within sections 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12 of T 68 S, R 81 E and section 7 of T 68 S R 82 E, Copper River Meridian. The sale area is found within the Petersburg A-3 and Craig D-3 USGS quadrangle. See attached map titled Attachment A SSE-1336K Coffman Cove Timber Sale Area Map and Attachment B SSE 1336K Coffman Cove Timber Sale Harvest Area Map

B. Title Status

The sale area lands were granted to the State through National Forest Community Grants 230, 345 and 386.

C. Land Use Planning, Classification, and Management Intent

Portions of this area are within the City of Coffman Cove.

1,194 acres of the proposed harvest area is within the Southeast State Forest (SESF). 282 Acres of the proposed harvest area is on lands classified as General Use. 152 acres of the proposed harvest area is on lands classified as Settlement Commercial (see attachment B Coffman Cove Timber Sale Land Use Map). The whole harvest area is within the geographic region covered by the Prince of Wales Area Plan (POWAP). The Southeast State Forest Management Plan (SESFMP) will be the managing document on SESF lands once adopted; adoption is expected January of 2015. The POWAP is the managing document on all General Use Lands and Settlement Commercial lands. Consultation with Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has occurred within the sale area and/or will occur prior to the sale. Per the POWAP harvest in Settlement lands may be appropriate and must be coordinated with adjacent land use development. As harvest of the initial 412 acres is restricted to SESF and General Use land coordination has not been conducted with the Division of Mine Land and Water (DMLW). Coordination with DMLW will occur prior to any harvest within Settlement lands and modification of harvest area within Settlement Lands may occur following coordination.

As of February 4, 2014, 1,001 acres of the proposed harvest area are closed to mineral entry by means of Mineral Closing Order 204 or Mineral Order 224. 627 acres of the proposed harvest area are open to mineral entry.

The Interagency Fire Management Plan includes these lands in the modified or full protection category.

D. Current Access and Land Use:

The main access for this sale area is through Alaska Highway System Coffman Cove, Alaska Route 7, and the adjoining USFS forest system roads 3030300, 3030400, 3030500 and 3030650. The sale area will utilize approximately 10 miles of existing road and will require the construction 5.8 miles of new road for access. Initial entry will only require construction of 4.1 miles of road. Roads will be maintained to the standards set out in AFRPA.

The primary purpose of State Forests is, “timber management that provides for the production, utilization, and replenishment of timber resources while allowing other beneficial uses of public land and resources.” (AS 41.17.200(a)). In the past General Use lands have been used for the same purpose and timber harvest has occurred in the past on these lands. Lands classified as Settlement Commercial are intended to be used for future commercial-industrial development. The adjacent public landowners including the University of Alaska, the United States Forest Service and City of Coffman Cove have conducted and/or are currently conducting or planning both selective and clear cut timber harvest operations on their lands. Adjacent private lands are owned by private entities; selective and clearcut harvest has occurred in the past on those lands.

E. Background and Description of Proposal

1. Background:

The Coffman Cove Timber Sale area is located primarily within the SESF.

A diversified economy is important to southeast Alaska. By direction from the Governor and Legislature, the Division of Forestry manages a timber sale program that makes timber volume available to help sustain the region’s timber industry and economy. The State’s land base cannot solely support the timber industry in its present form. However, it is the Division of Forestry’s intent to provide a supply of timber equal to the calculated annual allowable cut for southern southeast on a regular basis.

2. Timber Volume and Sustained Yield:

The total estimated sawlog volume for the initial sale area is 7,177 MBF on 412 acres. This volume is based on timber cruising through the Atterburry Cruise System. An additional 18,240 MBF on 1,216 acres is found within the proposed area. This additional volume is based on ground reconnaissance solely, and estimates will become further refined as additional information is obtained and field work occurs.

The Division of Forestry is required to manage its’ timber harvest on a sustained yield basis. “Sustained Yield” means the “achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of an annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of the State land consistent with multiple use” (AS 38.04.910). The Division’s policy is to define “regular periodic output” as output calculated over a decadal basis (ten-year period).

Based on current inventory information, the annual allowable cut (AAC) for the Southern Southeast Area is 12,135 thousand board feet. From fiscal year 2004 through fiscal year 2013, Southern Southeast timber sales have been less than the decadal allowable cut. For

calendar years 2012 and 2013, the Division of Forestry sold approximately 5,165 and 5,607 MBF of timber respectively. This proposed sale will not exceed the AAC for the period of time it will be offered.

This action alone and in combination with other timber sales that are sold will be within the allowable cut and comply with sustained yield requirements.

3. Harvest Unit Design:

All harvest sale area units will be designed for clearcut harvest using conventional methods.

- a. Reforestation and Site Preparation: The sale area will be reforested in compliance with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.375-.390)

Natural regeneration is the preferred regeneration method for this sale and it is anticipated that adequate stocking levels will be achieved within five years after harvest.

Consideration will be given to planting Sitka spruce on slopes under 30%.

- b. Road Access - Design and Construction: Road access design, construction, and maintenance will comply with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.285-.355).

No cataloged streams, anadromous streams, high value resident streams or resident streams will be crossed by proposed roads within the sale area.

General water quality streams will be crossed by proposed roads within the sale area. To maintain water quality during road construction, the Division of Forestry will mandate implementation of AFRPA's Best Management Practices (BMP).

To keep the potential for soil erosion to a minimum, the amount of road construction will be minimized so that none of the roads are located on steep slopes. The roads will be designed to follow the natural contours and benches in the area and will be located on flat or moderate slopes. Keeping roads off steeper slopes and located on flat benches not only minimizes soil erosion from road construction, but also minimizes erosion due to cable logging. The Division of Forestry will require full or partial suspension for any cable logging that occurs in the harvest units and ground based mechanical yarding will be suspended in times of saturated soil conditions. To minimize the potential for erosion, AFRPA slope stability standards and yarding BMPs will be adhered to at all times, as well as the BMPs for road construction and maintenance. The DOF timber sale administrator will ensure, with frequent field inspections, compliance with the timber sale contract and AFRPA.

At this time all constructed roads are planned to be left open and actively maintained. This may be modified in the future as community demands are heard and/or budget constraints require closure.

- c. Appraisal Method: The DOF will appraise the timber value in compliance with 11 AAC 71.092.

The sale area will be appraised by using a residual value appraisal method. Selling values and extraction cost numbers are obtained from industry sources, the United States Forest Service and previous operations.

F. Resources and Management

1. Timber

a. Timber Stand Composition and Structure:

The proposed harvest area has the characteristics of mature old growth on 1,045 acres and commercial second growth on 583 acres. Both old growth and second growth are composed of western hemlock, Sitka spruce, western red cedar and yellow cedar.

b. Stand Silvics:

The silvicultural prescription for the Coffman Cove Timber Sale area is clearcut harvest with natural regeneration. Planting of Sitka spruce may occur on slopes under 30%.

c. Topography and Soils:

The proposed sale will be designed and managed to prevent significant impairment of the land and water with respect to renewable resources (AS 41.17.060(c)(5)).

The timber sale occupies an area of gradual hills with varied topography ranging from gentle to moderate slopes; aspect varies throughout the sale area. Elevation ranges from 0 to 600 feet within the sale area. The majority of the sale area has slopes of less than 35%. Soils characteristics range from well drained to muskeg soil type.

2. Agriculture.

No agricultural use or grazing is known to occur within the area.

3. Wildlife habitat and harvest.

The Coffman Cove Timber Sale area will be designed to minimize the impacts on wildlife habitat. This sale will be designed using guidelines and management intent from the Prince of Wales Area Plan (POWAP), the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act and Regulations (AFRPA) and once adopted the SESFMP. The sale area was not identified as critical habitat (HA) or prime habitat (Hb) in the POWAP. Hunting and trapping does occur in the area. No areas of concern were identified by ADF&G in the comments received for the 2013-2017 FYSTS.

There will be no harvest within 100 feet on each side of anadromous water bodies and harvest within 100 to 300 feet of these water bodies will only occur if it is consistent with

the maintenance of important fish and wildlife habitat. These buffers also function as wildlife movement corridors. The sale is not expected to cause significant adverse impacts to the wildlife populations on POW.

The ADF&G has been consulted and will continue to be consulted throughout the sale process. Allowances will be made for important fish and wildlife habitat.

4. Fish Habitat, Water Resources, and Water Quality. The proposed sale will be designed and managed to protect fish habitat and water quality in compliance with the Forest Resources and Practices Act and regulations (AS 41.17 and 11 AAC 95) .

Cataloged streams 106-30-10120, 106-30-10150, 103-60-10160, 106-30-10670-2004-3017 and 106-30-10670-2004-0020 are the only cataloged anadromous water bodies within the timber sale area. There will be no harvest within 100 feet on each side of these anadromous water bodies and harvest within 100 to 300 feet of these water bodies will only occur if it consistent with the maintenance of important fish and wildlife habitat. In addition to providing the buffers along these anadromous water bodies, AFRPA will be implemented to maintain bank and soil stability, and in turn water quality. Due difference will be given to ADF&G in regard to habitat mitigation to ensure all fish, wildlife, and water quality issues are adequately addressed by the proposed timber sale design. No other anadromous or high value resident streams were identified adjacent to or within the sale area.

To protect water quality of non-fish bearing water bodies a combination of retention areas, directional felling, partial suspension of logs, split-yarding, and removal of logging debris from stream channels will be required. Due to the location of the units and the topography in relation to significant surface water bodies, the timber sale is anticipated to have minimal adverse impact on water quality.

In addition, low value and non-merchantable timber will be left along the streams that are not identified as anadromous or high value resident fish streams. Due to varied gradient of the streams and moderate topography of the sale area, any turbidity generated by the operations should settle out within the unit.

5. Recreation, Tourism, and Scenic Resources. This timber sale is expected to result in no adverse changes to recreational use of the area. Past timber sales have provided road access for dispersed recreational opportunities and this timber sale will provide additional access. Due to topography and the location of the timber sale it will be visible to the city of Coffman Cove.
6. Cultural Resources. The DOF works with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to identify and avoid known cultural, historic or prehistoric sites in planning the proposed access routes and salvage areas. If additional archaeological sites are identified, proposed salvage areas and road locations will be appropriately adjusted to avoid conflicts. If any historic or archaeological sites are encountered during road construction or harvest activities, DOF will immediately inform SHPO and take action to protect the findings.

Based on the July 17, 2009 Heritage Resource Report titled “Coffman Cove State Sale Archaeological Survey Report R2008100551009” by Shona Pierce, Archaeologist for the

United States Forest Service which conducted an archaeological survey for the DOF; “No cultural resources were located in the area of potential effects. Clearance is recommended for the proposed project based on the absence of historic properties within the area of potential effects.”

7. Subsurface Resources. There is no known current mining activity in the immediate area. Other than sharing some of the same access roads, this sale should have no impact on the potential mining resources or mining activity in this area.

G. Costs and Benefits

Timber sales have traditionally created economic benefits to the communities of Southeast Alaska. The business communities will receive direct economic benefits by providing support services for the operators such as fuel, food, housing, medical and miscellaneous supplies. The residents of the communities in Southeast Alaska will receive a direct benefit through employment opportunities and wages paid by the operator during the course of the timber harvest and milling operations.

VI. PUBLIC REVIEW

The public and agencies are invited to comment on this Proposed Best Interest Finding. Objections or comments pertaining to the proposed action must be received in writing by the DOF Southern Southeast Area Office **by 4:00 pm January 9, 2015** in order to ensure consideration for review. Comments should be mailed to the State of Alaska, Division of Forestry, 2417 Tongass Avenue Suite 213, Ketchikan AK 99901 or by email to clarence.clark@alaska.gov. For more information you may contact Clarence Clark at 907-225-6619 or by email at clarence.clark@alaska.gov. To be eligible to appeal the final decision, a person must have provided written comment by **4:00 pm January 9, 2015**.

VII. PUBLIC NOTICE

This PBIF was publicly noticed in compliance with AS 38.05.945. The notice was posted on the Alaska Online Public Notice System, and at the Ketchikan, Craig, Wrangell and Petersburg Public Libraries. Mailed notices were distributed to a mailing list maintained by the Southern Southeast Area Office and public notices were sent to the post offices of Ketchikan, Ward Cove, Craig, Klawock, Thorne Bay, Coffman Cove, Naukati, Edna Bay, Metlakatla, Wrangell and Petersburg. A legal notice is also provided in the Ketchikan Daily News, Island News, Wrangell Sentinel and Petersburg Pilot.

VIII. ALTERNATIVES AND DISCUSSION

The proposed sale meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and DNR’s constitutional mandate, provides royalties to the State, meets the silviculture objective of improving forest vigor, and creates additional jobs in Southeast Alaska due to the combination of road building, logging, trucking, and milling.

IX. RECOMMENDATION AND PRELIMINARY DECISION

After due consideration of all pertinent information and alternatives, the DNR has reached the following Preliminary Decision: To offer for sale approximately 1,045 acres of mature old growth and 583 acres of commercial second growth. Initially 412 acres of old growth, will be offered and the remaining 1,216 acres composed of old growth and second growth will be offered for sale at a later date to meet market demands and State regulations as described in this PBIF. The DOF finds that this preliminary decision satisfies the objectives stated in this document and it is in the best interest of the State to proceed with this action under its authority of AS 38.05.035(e) (Powers and Duties of the Director) & AS 38.05.110-120; 11 AAC 71 (Timber Sale Statutes and Regulations).

A person is eligible to participate in any appeal or request for reconsideration to the final finding if s/he has submitted comment to the preliminary finding and decision during the comment period.

If you have any questions, please contact Clarence Clark, Southeast Timber Sales Program Manager, via email, clarence.clark@alaska.gov or by phone at 907-225-6619

X. SIGNATURE



Clarence Clark SE Timber Sale Program Manager
Alaska Division of Forestry

12-9-14

Date

XI. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Harvest Area Map

Attachment B - Land Use Map