State of Alaska
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forestry
Coastal Region
Kenai / Kodiak Area

Final Decision
Best Interest Finding/
Forest Land Use Plan
North Ranch Timber Sale
SC-3051 K
October 2013

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry (DOF), Kenai-Kodiak Area, offering for sale approximately 120 acres in two cutting units. The sale contains an estimated 480 thousand board feet (MBF) of spruce, and an estimated 200 thousand board feet (MBF) of birch to be sold by sealed competitive bid. This sale will salvage spruce trees that are dead or infested by spruce beetles, as a portion of the birch trees. This sale is designed to minimize impacts on visual quality, recreation, tourism, water quality, and fisheries and provide forest products, primarily firewood. Timber harvest will entail salvaging dead trees, removing a portion of the overstory and leaving reserves of live trees to provide seed and wildlife habitat. The contract period for this sale will be less than five years.

This document also provides the necessary site specific information required for adoption as a Forest Land Use Plan (AS 38.05.112. Forest land use plans). This Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for the North Ranch Timber Sale will be adopted with the issuance of the Final Finding stating the timber sale is in the state's best interest.

This timber sale was available for review by concerned agencies and the public from October 18, 2013 through November 18, 2013.

B. Objectives

The primary objectives of this timber sale are:

1. To follow DNR's constitutional mandate to encourage the development of the state's renewable resources, making these resources available for maximum use consistent with the public interest. Firewood is the primary product of this sale, and therefore parallels the publics' increasing firewood demand.

2. To accelerate reforestation: harvesting timber is a means of preparing the area for new trees to establish. This proposal helps meet the Division's statutory responsibility to provide "…sound forest practices necessary to ensure the continuous growing and harvesting of commercial forest species on …state land."

3. Reduce the wildfire risk and potential destruction of private property by salvaging dead timber, which reduces fuel loading.

C. Five Year Schedule:

The North Ranch Timber Sale is currently listed in the last edition of the Five Year Timber Sale Schedule 2014-2018.

D. Location:

The legal description of this proposed action lies within: Section 28 Township 1 South, Range 13 West , Seward Meridian. Ninilchik is the nearest community, and is located about 6 miles southwest of the sale. Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI) and miscellaneous private lands are adjacent to the sale area. This sale can be located on the United States Geological Survey 1:63360 Quadrangle maps titled Kenai A-5.

E. Title, Classification and Other Active or Pending Interests:
This sale is located in an area covered by the Kenai Area Plan (adopted in January 2000) and is designated for Resource Management which allows timber harvests. This proposed sale complies with the guidelines and specific policies contained in the area plan. The management intent for this unit of the plan specifically identifies this proposed sale.

F. Planning Framework
The decision to offer the North Ranch Timber Sale was based on a long series of planning decisions, made with public and agency input every step of the way. This document, the Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for the timber sale, is one of the final steps in this long planning process. The planning for where timber harvest is appropriate, and where it is not appropriate, is done at a much broader scale than the FLUP. The framework for how management decisions are made for timber sales on the Kenai Peninsula is as follows:

1. Area plans, management plans, and land use plans (in this case, the *Kenai Area Plan*) determine where timber harvesting is allowed.

2. The Forest Resources and Practices Act and Regulations, and the Alaska Forest Management Statutes & Regulations determine how timber will be managed within areas where harvesting is allowed by the area plan.

3. The Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales proposes when timber sales will be offered, and approximately where and how big each sale will be.

4. Next, a Forest Land Use Plan is written for each individual sale, which contains more detailed decisions about each sale.

Both the area plan and the management plan processes openly reviewed resource information and public concerns prior to making long-range decisions about public land management. The planning processes determined how the complete range of uses would be accommodated in the proposed sale area, including opportunities for forestry, as well as protecting fish and wildlife habitat, opportunities for recreation, and the whole range of other uses. This document's decision to conduct a timber harvest in the area is developed based on the Kenai Area Plan's designation for this particular area that allows for timber harvest.

Next, the Division of Forestry prepares a Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales (FYSTS) every other year. The FYSTS gives the public, timber industry, and other agencies an overview of the division's plans for timber sales. They summarize information on proposed timber harvest areas, timber sale access, and reforestation plans. Five-Year Schedules are subject to public and agency review. The review helps identify issues that must be addressed in detailed timber sale planning. After review and revision, DNR uses the schedules to decide how and where to proceed with timber sale planning.
Finally, the Best Interest Finding and Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) is prepared. The FLUP presents detailed information on the location, access, harvest methods, duration, and proposed reforestation for each sale. The public is asked to comment at this stage, as well. By getting the best available data, combined with a series of public processes that helps us gather information from the public and other agencies, we make well-informed decisions about uses of resources on state land.

II. LEGAL AUTHORITY

The department is taking this action under the authority of AS 38.05.035(e) (Best Interest Finding); AS 38.05.110-120; 11 AAC 71 (Timber Sale Regulations); 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 offer timber within the North Ranch Timber Sale. This record will be maintained at the Kenai-Kodiak Area Office and filed as **SC-3051 K**.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF SALE AREA

A. Physical characteristics of the sale area

Topography and Soils
The North Ranch Timber Sale situated lies on gently rolling glacial outwash terrain. The elevation ranges from 250 to 300 feet above sea level and has a relatively flat aspect. The sale is located in an area that the spruce beetle has killed the surrounding timber.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service Soil Survey indicates that the predominate soil type in the sale area to the Cohoe Series. The Cohoe Series is a deep, moderate to well-drained silt loam occurring on nearly flat to strongly sloping terrain. The soil's susceptibility to erosion is rated as slight to moderate.

On long, continuous slopes this soil may present a danger to erosion. However, due to predominate rolling terrain with slopes less than 20 percent grade, and the fact that roads will be utilized only in the winter, there appears to be almost no chance of slope failure.

Waterbodies
There are two unnamed streams within and adjacent to the harvest units. Both streams flow into the Ninilchik River which has been catalogued by the Department of Fish & Game as anadromous fish habitat. The Ninilchik River flows approximately one mile west of the sale area. To date, there have been no blockages to fish passages observed in either of these tributaries to the Ninilchik River. Therefore, both streams will be provided riparian protection areas as required under AS 41.17.118 of the Alaska Forest Resources & Practices Act. Both streams have the characteristics of Type II C and Type II D classifications with respect to AS 41.17.950 of the Alaska Forest Resources & Practices Act.

In addition to retention within riparian areas as required under the Forest Practices Act, trees will be retained at the edge of harvest units in order to provide wildlife habitat as recommended by the Kenai Area Plan.

Timber Stand Conditions
Forest stands in the area are predominately upland stands of approximately 50% spruce and 40% birch and the remainder consisting of scattered cottonwood and aspen. As is the case throughout the Kenai Peninsula, the

spruce are hybrids between white spruce and Sitka spruce (*Picea glauca X sitchensis*). This hybrid is called Lutz spruce (*Picea X lutzii* Little). Willow, upland willow, and upland alder types are present as well as plant communities associated with muskegs. The largest spruce—once the overstory—died during the bark beetle infestation. Most of these trees have fallen over. There has been considerable changes to the forest stand structure, including: fewer seed trees, lower average DBH, lower average tree height, and declining in stand density. With the absence of available seed trees, natural regeneration is not expected to occur as quickly as healthy spruce stands. Birch regeneration is also decreased due to the severe competition of grass and inadequate seedbed availability.

Moderate to high coverage of bluejoint reedgrass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*) are already present throughout the area. Hence, competition with regeneration is expected to be high if site preparation for regeneration is delayed. Dense grass lowers the soil temperature and is a highly effective competitor. It inhibits the regeneration of both tree seedlings and browse species (Lieffers, et al 1993).

Wildfire Potential and Fuels Mitigation
The spruce beetle infestation during the 1990's resulted in the most significant ecological impact of any natural agent of change in Alaska (USDA 1996). The changes occurring in forests on the Kenai Peninsula are significant. The almost total loss of mature seed bearing trees over large landscapes will have very long term and profound affects on the Kenai Peninsula.

Spruce stands became increasingly jack-strawed as dead trees eventually fell over. Large dead trees were closer to the ground, and more exposed to fire even long after fine limbs and needles had rotted away. Surface fuels comprised of grass and downed trees enable wildfires to spread quickly and with greater intensity. Fires in this fuel type burn 20 times faster and 6 times more intensely than the fuel type associated with healthy white spruce stands, particularly in the spring and early fall (See 1997). Downed timber in tall grass impedes access into a fire area by firefighters and will severely limit the use of tactical ground forces such as engines, dozers and hand crews (See 1998). Even when suppressing fires during moderate environmental conditions, placing crews in this type of fuel poses a significant personal safety risk should winds begin to rapidly increase, change direction, or if sudden slope changes are encountered.

Large-scale spruce mortality significantly influenced wildlife habitat by changing the structure and function of the forest (INFEST #11). The loss of the mature spruce and the potential loss of the younger spruce component will result in the loss of hiding and thermal cover (DF&G 1994). The remaining live forest component will be composed primarily of young spruce seedling/saplings and scattered birch. Grass, in locations where residual tree density is minimal, will become the predominant ground cover and will inhibit the development of suckering and sprouting plants which reduces the availability of browse (Holsten, et. al. 1995). Therefore, as the stand structure changes, the population dynamics between wildlife species within the proposed sale area will vary.

B. Wildlife Habitat
The effects of the harvest activity will vary depending on species. Wildlife species that prefer mature and over-mature spruce stands will either be displaced or decline in numbers. Species preferring the grass-forb successional stage will likely increase in abundance (DF&G 1994).

The primary measures for minimizing impacts to wildlife habitat are the previously-mentioned fringes of timber that will be retained to provide wildlife cover. Approximately three to four standing trees per acre will be retained within the harvest unit as nesting habitat.

Only temporary ice roads will be used to access the sale area. After timber harvest activities cease in the spring, the access routes will be blocked with logs or large material to obstruct off road vehicle traffic. This will reduce wildlife impacts associated with roads. Harvest operations will occur typically from December to mid March, so disturbance from harvest operations will be relatively brief. Grass and alder will reseed rapidly on disturbed sites and help in effectively closing the road access. These actions are intended to closely align with the recommendations of the Kenai Peninsula Brown Bear Conservation Strategy (DF&G 2000).

Bears

No denning sites were found during field reviews for either black or brown bears. However, increased access associated with resource development is of concern to wildlife managers (Selinger, 2005). For black bear, the proposed timber sale is adjacent to potential late summer and early fall berry crops. Increased vulnerability of local black bear populations to hunting is a function of road location and road density which, in turn, is related to the timber harvesting systems used and the level of logging activity (DF&G 1994).

In 2010, the US Forest Service and the US Fish & Wildlife Service conducted a census for brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula. The result of the census was an estimate of 624 bears (USFS/USFWS 2012). The highest densities of brown bears are in the forested lowlands and sub-alpine areas west of the Kenai Mountains.

The highest densities of brown bears are in the forested lowlands and sub-alpine areas west of the Kenai Mountains. Bear activity in the sale area appears to be more temporary with bears passing through, rather than residing in large numbers or rearing young. Research suggests that home ranges for brown bears can cover tens to hundreds of square miles and because of this variability; the concept of home range size is not very useful (DF&G 2000). Due to the relatively small size of the proposed sale area in comparison to the above-mentioned home ranges, and the fact that concentrations of timber will be retained throughout the sale, impacts to brown bear habitat are expected to be minimized.

Logging roads may cause behavioral changes with the brown bear population. Although evidence suggests that road avoidance behavior and habitat loss leads to changes in wildlife productivity and survivorship, there is little data currently available to support this hypothesis (Frederick 1991). Several researchers suggest that grizzly bears habituate to open roads by shifting to a more nocturnal activity pattern. Apparently, darkness may serve as cover, allowing bears to use roads and adjacent habitats and cross open areas where they are vulnerable to human harassment and hunting mortality. To use areas within 100 meters (approximately 328 feet) of roads within their home range, bears have often done so under the cover of darkness by being nocturnal in their travel and feeding patterns (Frederick 1991). This travel period may be shorter in Alaska due to the state's latitude. However, numerous studies, including at least one in Alaska (Olson, et al 1998) have shown that brown bears will use highly disturbed areas by being nocturnal, while bears in undisturbed areas tend to be more crepuscular (active during twilight)(Frederick 1991). It has also been noted that sows with cubs and yearling juveniles more frequently used habitats near roads than other bears. These areas may have been relatively secure because potentially aggressive adult males avoided them (McLellan and Shackelton 1988). Several researchers reported that adult bears in open sites usually retreated to cover when a vehicle approached within 300 meters (984 feet).

However, researchers McLellan and Shackleton found that bears fled even further when approached by people on foot; in 5 of 9 cases when bears in remote areas were approached by humans, bears fled for distances greater than 1 km (0.6 miles), or out of the immediate drainage (Frederick 1991). This illustrates that bears find vehicular traffic less threatening than people on foot. This may be attributable to habituation.

The availability of security cover is considered important in how brown bears are influenced by human activities. Brown bears are at least twice as likely to be displaced from open areas where they can see or be seen by humans (Suring 1998). The harvested portion of the timber sale will provide little cover for bears until the regeneration reaches an adequate height. Seasonal road use and retained concentrations of timber are planned actions intended to align with the recommendations of the Kenai Peninsula Brown Bear Conservation Strategy (DF&G 2000).

Moose

Moose and moose sign have been seen throughout the sale area. Moose population estimates for Game Management Unit 15, covering the western peninsula, are estimated at 6,000 to 7,000 moose (DF&G 2003). DF&G observed that moose use the forested areas during the summer and feed heavily on the browse and forb species present. DF&G also observed that during the winter, moose pellet groups were less abundant in the interior of upland plateau timber stands than in riparian areas, on slopes and in or near glades. Willow, a primary browse species, is found more abundantly in open areas.

The increased deadfall and debris on the forest floor could limit access to preferred foraging areas and limit mobility during critical times of the year for moose (DF&G 1994). DF&G (2003) notes that increasing deadfall over time will make moose travel through these areas more difficult.

While birch is not the dominate species in the sale area, this sale operation is intended to result in viable birch trees left standing as future seed sources. Ground disturbance from logging activity and site preparation is expected to result in favorable conditions for subsequent birch regeneration.

Cover is more important in summer conditions; moose have an efficient way of keeping warm in severe weather but are less efficient in moderating the effects of high summer temperatures that can cause them to overheat (INFEST #6). The unharvested fringes of timber along the muskeg will provide some cover, but the harvested areas will not provide shading and calving areas. The concentrations of retained timber along muskegs and unharvested patches of timber will be scattered throughout the sale area to provide cover.

Other Fur Bearers

Timber harvest activities are expected to impact the habitat for ermines, mink, and river otters by reducing cover or abundance of available prey. By retaining timber in riparian areas—as will be required in this proposed sale—the above-mentioned impacts will be offset.

Lynx occur throughout the general area. Lynx will use early successional habitats resulting from timber cutting, but require proximity to mature mixed forests (DF&G 1994).
Snowshoe hares are apparently increasing numbers in proximity to the sale area. This species is subject to population rises, followed by abrupt declines. As to when this when the population will decline is unknown,

but will probably be associated with other factors than the impacts of timber harvest. During peak population cycles, hares browsing can cause significant reduction in young tree development.

Birds
Spruce grouse are also affected by the loss of spruce trees to the spruce beetle primarily through the loss of winter feeding habitat (DF&G 1994).

Timber harvest operations will have similar effects. The loss of canopy will result in increased mortality from predation because of more visible nests and loss of protection from inclement weather (DF&G 1994). Leave areas will help to offset this loss to the extent that they are useful. Scarification, where feasible and quick reforestation efforts will help to create more suitable habitat conditions in a shorter period of time than if left in an unmanaged condition.

The potential effects from a timber harvest on cavity-nesting and other non-game birds will be the shortage of suitable nesting trees, which could result in lower numbers of birds. The conversion of sites to early successional stages could result in a shift in bird species composition to favor birds that prefer grass, shrub/forb, and sapling habitats (DF&G 1994).

Fish Habitat
Streams identified as fish habitat are mentioned "Water Bodies" Section. The Alaska Forest Resources & Practices Act and the Regulations require protection of anadromous and high value resident fish. The Forest Practices Act requires that timber be left along fish habitat.

The Forest Practices Act and the Regulations also require that stream crossings prevent damage to fish habitat. Stream crossings in the sale area will also be subject to fish passage, and habitat protection requirements under the Department of Fish & Game's Title 16 regulatory authority.

C. Human activity and social considerations

Hunting
Based on field observations, the area is hunted primarily by local residents; hunting pressure is not expected to increase in the area as a result of timber harvest. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is responsible for setting hunting regulations, including restricting hunting areas.

Subsistence
The subject area has not been designated as a subsistence zone. Under current state law, subsistence harvest opportunities within the timber sale have been incorporated in general hunting and fishing regulations (DF&G 10/23/94). There are the following possible subsistence uses in the area: trapping, hunting and gathering of berries. The effects of the spruce beetle infestation and the proposed timber harvest on wildlife species of interest to both trapping and hunting are detailed above in the wildlife section. Most of the *Vaccinium* species prefer open forest conditions, which would tend to indicate that the berry crops might do well as the stands open up. However, Holsten, et al. (1995) indicated that on untreated beetle killed sites, lowbush cranberry decreased in number and on burned sites it doubled. It is anticipated that the berry crop will not be significantly affected by the proposed treatment.

Recreation
Based on field observations, there appears to be intermittent recreation presumably by local residents. Generalized use of ATV's was evident in the area. The area may be used for moose hunting in the fall, but there was no evidence of any established camps or recreational use sites. This area is not known to have unique tourism values. At this time, there are no commercial recreation operations that use this area.

Cultural Resources
Currently, there no reports of cultural or historical sites in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey within the sale area (DNR/ Parks, AHRS, 2013). The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (**AHRS**) is an inventory of all reported historic, prehistoric, and paleontological sites within the State of Alaska. The AHRS will be examined for updated information regarding the sale area prior to advertising this timber sale.

Under the Alaska Historic Preservation Act (41.35.200), all burials on state land are protected. If burials or human remains are found, all land-altering activities that would disturb the burial or remains shall cease and measures will be taken to protect it in place. The Office of History and Archaeology and a law enforcement officer will be notified immediately to ensure that proper procedures for dealing with human remains are followed.

Scenic
This sale will not be visible from the Sterling Highway, but will be by aircraft, snowmachiners, and ATV users. Primary access to the sale area is through private land ownerships which may limit public exposure. Prompt reforestation, timber retention areas near wetlands, and the retention of all live spruce and birch, will lessen what visual impact may be caused by harvest operations.

Land Use
Existing land use includes an oil and gas lease within the sale area. No agricultural use or grazing is known to occur. Traditional use areas may exist but the sale will not adversely impact these uses. However, opportunities for hunting and berry picking will likely be improved. A powerline cuts through the western portion of the sale. Snowmobiles and ATV users enjoy travel within the sale area.

D. Sustained yield and allowable cut
This proposal complies with sustained yield/allowable cut principles outlined in the Kenai-Kodiak Area's Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales for 2014 - 2018.

E. Silviculture and Timber Harvest
The silvicultural prescription selected for spruce in this sale is salvage harvest, while keeping green reserves. All merchantable dead or infested spruce larger than eight inches in DBH will be removed. Live spruce greater than 9 inches diameter at breast height will be allowed for harvest. After harvest, the resulting stand will consist of multi-age spruce, due to the age diversity of the seedlings and pole-sized trees left in the stand. Healthy spruce and all birch will be retained for seed production and wildlife cover. Birch is present in this stands; however it averages less than 30% of the total stem density. Birch is a prolific seeder, but viability of seed is potentially low due to age and vigor of the birch. Birch trees are not expected to grow to maturity in large numbers in the sale area, due to moose browse. The birch is not expected to contribute significantly to regeneration of the harvest area. Birch trees will be allowed for harvest at the discretion of the state.

Delimbed tops will be re-scattered and allowed to decompose or will be burned. Some piles will be retained for their wildlife values. Large amounts of nutrients such as phosphorous, nitrogen, and to a lesser extent for other mineral elements, are stored in the foliage, twigs, and branches; smaller amounts are in the main trunk of the tree (Bartels 1985). This material (limbs, twigs, and needles) is an important source of nutrients for the next stand of trees; typically over 95% of the nitrogen is contained within this material (Perry, et. al. 1989). Disposal of green or infested spruce material larger than five inches in diameter shall be in accordance with the standards set in 11 AAC 95.195(b) of the Forest Practices Regulations. Stump heights will be kept as low as feasible, typically less than one foot.
The sale area will be harvested in the winter. Logging will not be authorized during spring break-up, which usually occurs during a period from mid-April to June 1. The length of time to complete the harvest operations will be two years. Directional falling may be required to protect 70 percent of the seedlings, saplings and pole-sized residuals. The contract will require that care be taken to minimize damage to residuals.

The State will conduct regeneration surveys within 2 years following harvest to determine if artificial regeneration will be necessary. Planting may be necessary on sites lacking sufficient regeneration to meet stocking standards. Planted spruce seedlings will be grown from locally collected seed. This proposal may be adjusted post-harvest depending on the success in protecting residual seedlings and saplings.

Regeneration surveys will monitor trends of survival and species composition and also help to determine if any further reforestation effort is required to meet the reforestation requirements of the Forest Resources and Practices Act (11 AAC 95.375).

F. Transportation

The sale is approximately 8 miles northeast of Ninilchik, and accessed from a road locally referred to as the CIRI Tract 3 Road, and Lake Road. Lake Road extends north from Oilwell Road approximately 3.7 miles from Ninilchik. Both of these roads pass through land owned by Ninilchik Native Association and then land owned by Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI). The timber sale purchaser will need to obtain written permission from Ninilchik Native Association and from CIRI in order to haul logs over these roads. Use of private roads for logging has been subject to road use fees by the land owners (CIRI, 2011).

All temporary roads will be put to bed upon completion of use in accordance with the Forest Resources and Practices Regulations on road closure (11 AAC 95.320). If necessary, log hauling on ice roads will begin when underlying ground is frozen sufficiently to support equipment.

The timber sale purchasers will be required to close roads on state lands at the conclusion of their sale. The temporary roads on state land that are put to bed upon completion of use will be closed in accordance with the Forest Resources and Practices Regulations on road closure (11 AAC 95.320). Additionally, wood debris will be spread over a portion of the road bed to minimize future impacts of all terrain vehicles.

G. Erosion

This proposed firewood sale is on relatively flat terrain; the overall slope is less than ten percent grade. Therefore, no slope failures or soil movement is expected.

H. Mining
There is no known mining activity in this area and therefore no effect.

I. Materials
This proposed harvest will not preclude future development of a material site. Needed borrow material for the timber sale road(s) will be minimal and acquired from within the right of way. No pits will be developed.

V. MARKET CONDITIONS AND ECONOMICS

The local market includes domestic sawlogs, house logs and firewood. Most of the timber from this sale area will probably be sold and utilized as firewood. The cost of heating oil on the Kenai Peninsula rose sharply in 2008. The demand for firewood has increased noticeably over the previous two years. Consequently, firewood sold for $200 to $250 per cord in 2012. Firewood prices are presently competitive with sawlogs as an end product for all but the green wood. Firewood will likely be in greater public demand than either sawlogs or house logs in the near future. The DOF anticipates this sale to be marketable based on past sale activity.

VI. ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

After a review of the material and information discussed above, the following alternatives have been considered:

1. **Offer a timber sale as outline in this Forest Land Use Plan.** This alternative meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and one of DNR's mandates to make the state's renewable resources available for public use. It also meets the silvicultural objective of improving forest vigor, provides for a value-added end product and creates additional local jobs due to the combination of road building, logging, and trucking.

2. **Offer this timber sale at another time.** We believe that postponing the harvest of timber within the block is not in the public interest. As the dead trees continue to decay, their merchantability will decline; therefore it is important to provide opportunities to utilize a resource that currently is in high public demand—firewood.

Additionally, the increasing fuel loading as a result of the dead trees is not in the public's interest. Trees that would otherwise be salvaged would become sources for ignition and fuel loading for a potential catastrophic wildland fire. This timber block is located in the wildland-urban interface and is a high priority for removal of potentially hazardous fuels. Additionally, postponing the sales to a later date could result in sufficient loss of market value that the sale would become uneconomical.

3. **Modify the Sale by making the harvest units smaller.** This sale is intended to be large enough to be economically viable for mechanical logging methods. Increasing the size of the harvest unit will eliminate the surrounding no-harvest buffers which are intended to provide visual cover for wildlife. Decreasing the size of the sale area will reduce the supply of firewood and leave more timber to further deteriorate on the site and exacerbate the wildfire fuel loading. This sale is large enough to cover the costs of constructing access roads and cover the mobilization costs to operate in the Ninilchik area under historic conditions. This sale is appropriately balanced to maintain other resource values as well as provide economic benefits to the Kenai Peninsula.

4. **Do not offer this timber sale.** This alternative would result in not meeting any of the objectives outlined for this management action. Utilization of the forest resource would not be achieved. There would be no significant contribution to the state and local economies. This alternative would delay the management objectives planned for the area, would deny making a source of raw materials available to the local wood products industry, and would delay the harvest of dead trees, mature trees, disease infected trees, and trees at risk to insect infestation. Decay in infected and infested mature spruce and birch trees results in loss of economic value.

VII. BEST INTEREST FINDING

The purpose of this decision is to determine if the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, will make available timber located in portions of Section 28 Township 1 South, Range 13 West, Seward Meridian.

After due consideration of all pertinent information and alternatives, the Division of Forestry has reached the following **Final Decision: To offer the sale as proposed in Alternative 1.** The Division of Forestry finds that this final decision satisfies the objectives as 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(c) and AS 38.05.120.

REQUESTS FOR RECONSIDERATION

A person affected by this decision who provided timely written comment or public hearing testimony on this decision may appeal it, in accordance with 11 AAC 02. Any appeal must be received by December 30, 2013 and may be mailed or delivered to Joe Balash, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources, 550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1400, Anchorage, Alaska 99501; faxed to 1-907-269-8918, or sent by electronic mail to mailto:dnr.appeals@alaska.gov. If no appeal is filed by that date, this decision goes into effect as a final order and decision on January 9, 2014. An eligible person must first appeal this decision in accordance with 11 AAC 02 before appealing this decision to Superior Court. If you have any questions, please contact Hans Rinke at the Kenai / Kodiak Area Office at (907) 260-4200 or e-mail hans.rinke@alaska.gov.

Failure of the commissioner to act on a request for reconsideration within 30 days after issuance of this decision is a denial of reconsideration and is final administrative order and decision for the purposes of an appeal to Superior Court. The decision may be appealed to Superior Court within a further 30 days in accordance with the rules of the court, and to the extent permitted by applicable law. An eligible person must first request reconsideration of this decision in accordance with 11 AAC 02 before appealing this decision to Superior Court. A copy of 11 AAC 02 may be obtained from any regional information office of the Department of Natural Resources.

If you have any questions, please contact Hans Rinke Kenai-Kodiak Area Forester at (907) 260-4200 or by e-mail hans.rinke@alaska.gov.

Michael Curran
Coastal Regional Forester

12-5-13
Date

Abbreviations
ADFG: Alaska Department of Fish and Game
AHRS: Alaska Heritage Resources Survey
BMPs: Best Management Practices
DBH: diameter at breast height
DEC: Department of Environmental Conservation
DLP: Defense of Life and Property
DNR: Department of Natural Resources
DOF: Division of Forestry
FF: Final Finding (Forest Land Use Plan)
FLUP: Forest Land Use Plan
FRPA: Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act
FYSTS: Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales
KAP: Kenai Area Plan
ORV: off-road vehicle
PD: Preliminary Decision (Forest Land Use Plan)
SHPO: State Historic Preservation Office

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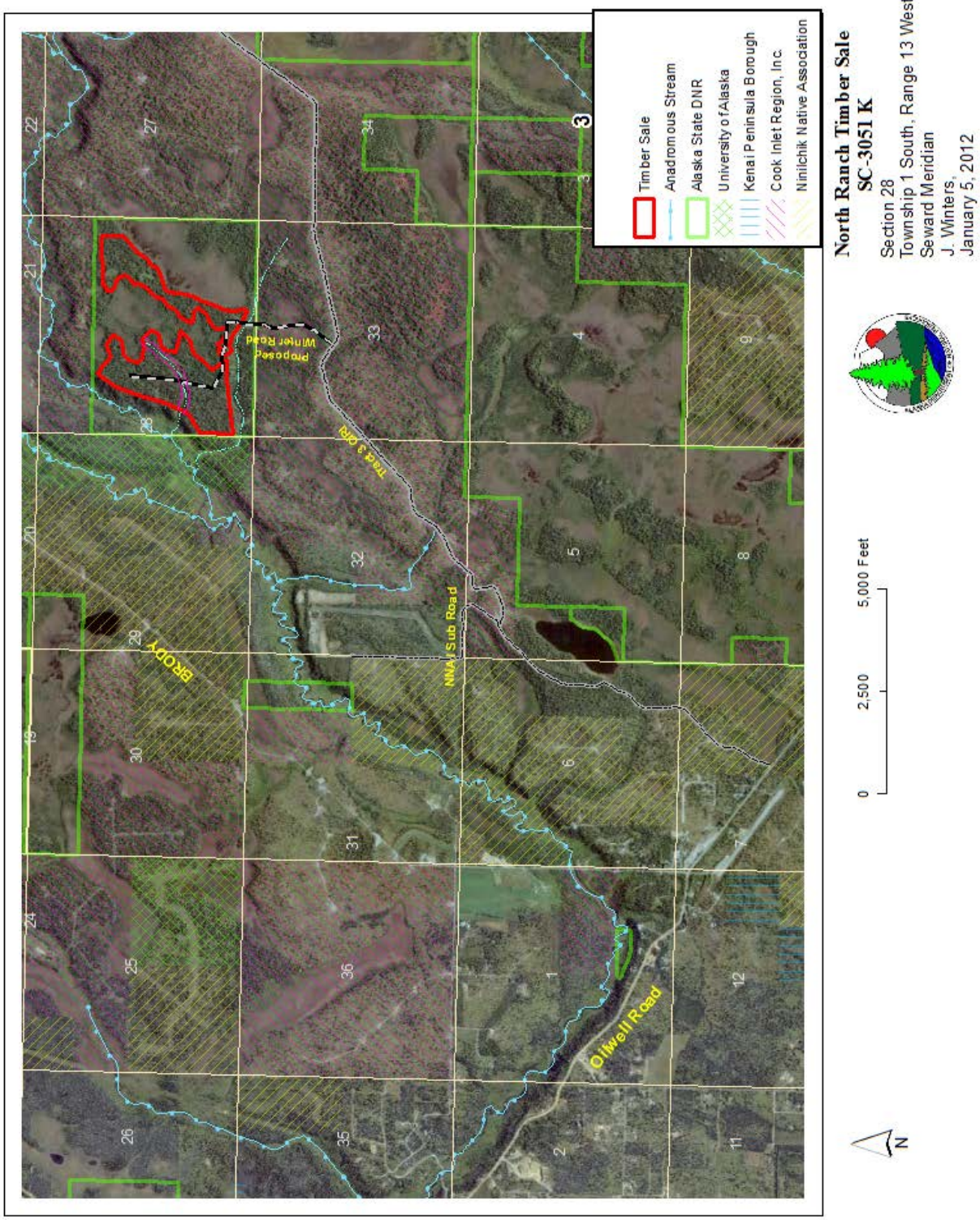
Links to Planning Documents:

Kenai Area Plan: http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/areaplans/kenai/pdfs/master_KAP.pdf

Timber Sale Maps


Timber Sale
Anadromous Stream
Alaska State DNR
University of Alaska
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Cook Inlet Region, Inc.
Ninilchik Native Association
North Ranch Timber Sale
SC-3051 K
Section 28
Township 1 South, Range 13 West
Seward Meridian
J. Winters,
January 5, 2012
Proposed Winter Road
Trail 3 ORI
NNA Sub Road
BRODY
Oilwell Road
0
2,500
5,000 Feet
N

Comments & Responses
Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry November 2013

The following comments were received during the public comment period on the North Ranch Timber Sale.

Organization	**Author**	**Location**
Alaska Department of Natural Resources/Parks	Judith Bittner	Anchorage
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation	Kevin Hanley	Juneau

Commenter	**Comment**	**Response**
Judith Bittner	These comments were submitted to the Division of Forestry in 2012 during the initial planning process for the North Ranch Timber Sale. "Following our review and after discussing the subject FLUPs in detail with the Division of Forestry personnel (John Winters), our office has no site specific concerns in regard to cultural resources."	Noted. Any cultural artifacts or remains discovered will be protected from impacts on scene and reported to the State Historical Preservation Office
Kevin Hanley	Given the paucity of streams or other surface waters within the individual harvest units of these sales, we have no significant concerns for the maintenance of water quality. In addition, we trust that the road construction and stream crossing components of the sales will be done in accordance with the standards of 11 AAC 95.290(f),(g),(h), and (i), and 11 AAC 95.300(a)(5). These standards pertain to proper winter road and ice bridge construction, use, and closure techniques for the protection of water quality.	Noted. The timber sale operator will be required to build roads and harvest timber in compliance with the Alaska Forest Resources & Practices Act and the Regulations.