

STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION



FAIRBANKS-DELTA AREA FORESTRY
PRELIMINARY BEST INTEREST FINDING AND
DECISION FOR
Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
NC-1583-F, NC-1982-F, NC-1844-F

July 2024

Abbreviations

AAC	Alaska Administrative Code
ADEC	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
ADNR	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
AS	Alaska Statute
BIF	Best interest finding
CCF	100 cubic feet (timber volume)
DBH	Diameter at breast height (4.5 feet above ground)
DMLW	Division of Mining, Land and Water
DOF	Division of Forestry & Fire Protection
FLUP	Forest Land Use Plan
FRPA	Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act
FYSTS	Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales
MBF	Thousand board feet
OHA	Office of History and Archeology
ROW	Right-of-way
TVSF	Tanana Valley State Forest

Contents

I.	PROPOSED ACTION	1
II.	STATUTORY AND REGULATORY AUTHORITY	1
III.	ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD.....	1
IV.	SCOPE OF DECISION.....	1
V.	PROJECT LOCATION, LAND STATUS, AND DESCRIPTION.....	3
A.	Location	3
B.	Title status.....	3
C.	Land use planning, classification, and management intent.....	3
D.	Current access and land use	3
E.	Background and description of proposal	4
F.	Resources and management.....	5
G.	Costs and benefits	8
VI.	PUBLIC REVIEW	8
VII.	PUBLIC NOTICE	9
VIII.	ALTERNATIVES AND DISCUSSION.....	9
IX.	RECOMMENDATION AND PRELIMINARY DECISION	10
X.	SIGNATURE	10
XI.	ATTACHMENTS	11

I. PROPOSED ACTION

DOF is proposing to offer for sale approximately 140 acres of mature birch forest and mixed birch and spruce forest from state lands in the Nenana Ridge Forest Road area. The volume to be offered totals approximately 2,256 Cords (2,031 CCF) of birch fuelwood and 314 MBF (807 CCF) of spruce sawlog. DOF would sell the timber as three competitive bid timber sales for commercial use. The land covered by this PBIF appeared in the 2024 Fairbanks-Delta Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales (FYSTS).

The management objectives for the proposed timber sales are:

- Provide raw material for the forest industry to produce timber products that provide benefits to the state and local economy through employment opportunities.
- Harvest the commercial fuelwood before a significant decrease in vigor occurs and return the site to a young, productive mixed forest.
- Provide firewood for the residential heating needs of interior Alaska communities.
- Promote multiple use management that provides for the production, utilization, and replenishment of timber resources while perpetuating personal, commercial, and other beneficial non-timber uses of forest resources.

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 Fairbanks-Delta Area Office filed as NC-1583-F, NC-1982-F, NC-1884-F.

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. The following list summarizes the overall process:

Step 1: Regional planning. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) 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 allowable 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 Tanana Valley State Forest (TVSF) Management Plan. The finding also considers the Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. There is no Community Wildfire Protection Plan in this area.

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales Preliminary Best Interest Finding

Step 2: Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales (AS 38.05.113). The Fairbanks-Delta Area Office prepares a Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales every other year. The Schedule identifies proposed sales, including their location, volume, and main access routes. The Five-year Schedules are scoping documents that provide an opportunity for public, agency, and industry to identify potential issues and areas of interest for further consideration in the best interest finding and Forest Land Use Plan. A proposed timber sale must appear in at least one of the two Five-year Schedules preceding the sale.

Step 3: Best Interest Finding. A best interest finding is the decision document that:

- Ensures that the best interest of the State will be served by this proposed action,
- 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 (PBIF) 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, DOF reviews comments, makes changes as appropriate, and issues a final best interest finding (BIF). DOF must adopt a final BIF before selling timber. An eligible person affected by this decision, and who provided timely written comment or public hearing testimony to the department, may appeal the decision to the DNR Commissioner per AS 44.37.011 and 11 AAC 02.

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. DOF will prepare FLUPs for the harvest areas within the overall sale area covered by this best interest finding. FLUPs specify the site, size, timing, and harvest methods for harvest units 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, and completion of the FLUP, DOF will offer the timber for sale by auctioning competitive sales and/or negotiating some sales with purchasers. The Division will sign a contract with the winning bidder for each sale. The contract will include stipulations to ensure compliance with the best interest finding, FLUP, and statutory requirements.

Step 6: Sale administration. DOF administers timber sales and conducts field inspections to ensure compliance with the final best interest finding, FLUP, timber sale contract, and applicable

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

laws, including the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act 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 proposed sales are located approximately 29 miles southwest of the Fairbanks Area Forestry office in the Nenana Ridge Forest Road/Upper Grouse Forest Road area south of the Parks Highway Mile 328. The proposed sales share a north-facing slope above Little Goldstream Creek and are accessed via the same forest road system. NC-1583-F is north of the Nenana Ridge Forest Road at mile 6, and NC-1982-F is north of the Upper Grouse Forest Road at mile 1.5. NC-1844-F is north of the Nenana Ridge Forest Road at mile 7.

NC-1583-F is within Section 8, Township 3 South, Range 5 West, Fairbanks Meridian. NC-1982-F is within Section 15, Township 3 South, Range 6 West, Fairbanks Meridian. NC-1844-F is within Sections 7 and 18, Township 3 South, Range 5 West, Fairbanks Meridian. The sale areas are shown on the attached map and are within the United States Geological Survey 1:63,360 Quadrangle map titled Fairbanks C-4.

B. Title status

The proposed sale areas are owned and managed by the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The acquisition for the land upon which NC-1583-F and most of the area within NC-1844-F is proposed is based on General Selection 39, the title transferred by Patent 50-85-0137. The acquisition for the land upon which the remaining area within NC-1844-F is proposed is based on General Selection 21, the title transferred by Patent 1220532. The acquisition for the land upon which NC-1982-F is proposed is based on General Selection 28, the title transferred by Patent 50-86-0071. There are no known title restrictions in these areas.

C. Land use planning, classification, and management intent

The proposed area is legislatively designated as part of Subunit 5A of the Tanana Valley State Forest (AS 41.17.400), and is managed according to the Tanana Valley State Forest Management Plan, 2001 Update. Subunit 5A will be managed for timber production, habitat and recreation while retaining scenic values along the Parks Highway. Unit 5 will remain open to mineral location and leasing.

The Interagency Fire Management Plan includes these lands in the 'Full' protection category.

D. Current access and land use

NC-1583-F is located along the Nenana Ridge Forest Road system and is accessible via a secondary spur road roughly 1.8 miles in length. The spur will be extended an additional 0.25

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

miles to the sale area. The spur road connects to Nenana Ridge Road just beyond 3.5-mile, which joins the Parks Highway near milepost 328.

NC-1982-F is located along the Upper Grouse Forest Road system and is accessible via an existing secondary spur road roughly 0.25 miles in length. The spur road connects to Upper Grouse Road at roughly 1.5-mile, which joins Nenana Ridge Road around 9-mile before joining the Parks Highway near milepost 328. No additional construction is required to access this sale.

NC-1844-F is located along the Nenana Ridge Forest Road system and is directly accessible via the Nenana Ridge Forest Road. The sale sits just before mile 7, which joins the Parks Highway near milepost 328. No additional construction is required to access this sale.

ANCSA Village Corporation land exists roughly 1.5 miles north of these sales, with private parcels of varying size to the east and west 1+ miles from the sale areas.

Existing land uses consist of motorized recreational access, dog-mushing, hunting, trapping, and personal use and commercial timber harvest.

E. Background and description of proposal

1. Background: According to the Tanana Valley State Forest Management Plan, Subunit 5A shall be “managed for timber production, habitat and recreation while retaining scenic values along the Parks Highway”. The Division of Forestry is offering these sales with the intent to maintain a productive working forest while continuing to provide habitat, recreation, and scenic values.
2. Timber volume and sustained yield: The proposed project area has an estimated 2,256 Cords (2,031 CCF) of birch fuelwood and 314 MBF (807 CCF) of spruce sawlog on approximately 140 acres. Final harvest unit boundaries and timber volume estimates will be determined upon completion of sale preparation activities. The Fairbanks Area Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) is calculated at approximately 4,606 acres of harvest annually. The volumes proposed in these harvests alone, and in combination with timber volumes from other proposed timber sales, will be within the Annual Allowable Cut and comply with sustained yield requirements.
3. Harvest unit design: The 140 acres to be offered will be split between three individual sales, each with one planned cutting unit. Cutting units buffer stand type boundaries and existing harvest units to retain an adequate seed source of mature birch. Some cutting units are designed to be buffered 50-75 feet from primary roads to protect public safety from direct harvest activities.
 - 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). The preferred reforestation method for birch rotational harvest is via natural seeding from adjacent trees. The harvest unit design described above retains adjacent

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

mature forest to provide an adequate birch seed source. Mechanical ground scarification will be required on these sales to expose mineral soil microsites for birch seedling establishment and limit competition from grasses. Reforestation will be assessed five years post-harvest with a regeneration survey if the site appears to have marginal seedling establishment. If surveys indicate inadequately stocked areas (less than a minimum of 450 evenly distributed trees per acre of commercial species), additional silvicultural actions may be performed to intervene and improve stocking.

- b. Access design and construction: Access design, construction, and maintenance will comply with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.285-.355).
 - Primary access to the sale areas will involve use and maintenance of the Nenana Ridge/Upper Grouse Forest Roads, with construction of roughly 0.25 miles of secondary spur road to access NC-1583-F.
 - It is not anticipated that access to proposed sales would require a Fish Habitat Permit issued by ADF&G for a winter stream crossing (AS 16.05.871 (b)) due to their landscape positions.
 - Between individual sale harvests, spur roads will be inactive and maintained in accordance with 11 AAC 95.315 (f).
 - Generally, DOF applies for public easement rights-of-way for long-term routes, but access spur roads do not qualify.
- c. Appraisal method: DOF will appraise the timber value in compliance with 11 AAC 71.092. Commercial sales will be based on transactional evidence and market demand and DOF will apply a value for those products.

F. Resources and management

1. Timber.

- a. Timber stand composition and structure: NC-1583-F and NC-1982-F are primarily mature closed-canopy birch forest, with incidental components of other commercial species. NC-1844-F is mature mixed species forest with relatively equal components of both birch and spruce sawtimber.
- b. Stand silvics: Regeneration of birch occurs principally from seed-fall spread by wind, and secondarily from root-collar sprouting. Data and research on regeneration and growth characteristics of these species are compiled within the Resource Analysis of the Tanana Valley State Forest (TVSF) Management Plan. The harvest and reforestation systems available in Interior Alaska are also reviewed and listed in the Resource Analysis. The results of the public and agency discussions for harvest and reforestation are discussed in the TVSF Management Plan. Silvicultural harvest systems that facilitate even-aged (natural) management are generally preferred. They mimic the ecological impact of wildfire and other disturbances and result in the greatest increase in site productivity. Even-aged

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

management is normally accomplished through clear cuts, patch cuts and heavy partial cuts (such as seed tree or shelterwood systems), which opens up the site to maximum solar gain. This results in the greatest production of both young hardwood that is important to wildlife and the spruce understory valuable years later as timber. Even-aged management techniques are utilized to provide young, vigorously growing stands in juxtaposition to older, undisturbed stands. Such placement of harvest units can optimize natural seeding and the edge effect. NC-1583-F and NC-1982-F are heavy partial cuts to remove the dominant birch overstory that, in conjunction with scarification, should provide a high-light and exposed mineral soil environment favorable for birch to seed and establish. NC-1844-F is a clearcut to remove the dominant birch and spruce overstory that, in conjunction with scarification, should provide a high-light and exposed mineral soil environment favorable to release advance regeneration of spruce and for birch to seed and establish.

- c. Topography and Soils: The proposed sales 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)). NC-1583-F lies within the upper half of a north-facing concave bowl between 700'-800' above sea level. Slope is predominantly less than 10%, until reaching the backline of the sale nearest the ridge where slopes shift toward 20%. The lower two thirds of the sale are underlain with Fairbanks silt-loam 7-12% slope. This soil type is well drained and sits more than 80 inches above the water table with a moderate runoff potential. The upper third of the sale is underlain with Fairbanks-Steese complex 20-30% slope. This soil type is also well drained with a higher runoff potential.

NC-1982-F sits in a similar north-facing bowl between 650'-750' above sea level. The sale area steepens from west to east, gaining from less than 10% to upwards of 25%. The upper half of the sale is underlain with Fairbanks silt-loam 20-30% slope. This soil type is well drained with a high runoff potential. The lower half of the sale is underlain with Minto silt-loam 7-12% slope. This soil type is moderately well drained with a moderate runoff potential.

NC-1844-F lies in a northwest-facing bowl 650'-850' above sea level. Average slope is less than 15%. The lower half of the sale is underlain with Minto silt loam 7-12% slope. This soil type is moderately well drained with a moderate runoff potential. The upper half of the sale is Fairbanks silt loam, 20-30% slope. This soil type is well drained and has a high runoff potential.

2. Agriculture. The proposed sales are not anticipated to have any impact on current or future agricultural activity in the area, and any effects of any timber sale operations for agricultural uses will be minimal.
3. Wildlife habitat and harvest. Should an eagle nest tree be discovered in the sale area, the nest tree will be marked on the ground and a 330-foot no-harvest radius will be

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

established to protect the tree. No critical wildlife habitat has been identified for this area (TVSF Management Plan).

Treatments proposed for this stand are projected to enhance habitat conditions for moose, voles, hares, and ultimately, lynx, marten and fox. In the past, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation have recommended managing for as much diversity as possible when prescribing harvest unit size, shape and position to mimic the results of wildfire or other stand replacement phases such as insect outbreaks or flood events. To accomplish these objectives snags will be retained wherever feasible to provide late-successional wildlife habitat for hole nesting birds, woodpeckers, small mammals, and other species requiring perching habitat. The unit will be laid out with an uneven edge, along and between timber types. This will create varied edge effect that is beneficial to many wildlife species.

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). NC-1583-F is roughly 500 feet from perennial flowing waters, and NC-1982-F is over 1 mile from perennial flowing waters. NC-1844-F is roughly 0.5 miles from perennial flowing waters. The proposed sale areas fall within the Little Goldstream Creek watershed which drains into Minto Flats before joining Goldstream Creek. The proposed sales 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). DOF will ensure Best Management Practices are being adhered to by requiring a complete logging plan prior to the start of any harvesting, conducting on-site inspections during logging operations and a final inspection prior to terminating the timber sale.
5. Recreation, tourism, and scenic resources. The Nenana Ridge area is used for recreational activities as well as hunting. During the winter months skiing, dog mushing, snow-machining and many other activities are common. The logging road system provides an excellent infrastructure for recreationists to access trails and waterways. The proposed harvest areas are expected to be intermittently visible 2.5+ miles to the south of the Parks Highway. To mitigate impacts to the scenic viewshed, timber sale cutting units will be designed with irregularly shaped harvest boundaries and irregularly shaped retention islands of mature forest. These actions in addition to the mature forest between the proposed sales and the Parks Highway, and generally mellow gradient slopes within the proposed sales should adequately reduce the impact on the scenic viewshed.
6. Cultural Resources. 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 harvest areas. If additional archaeological sites are identified, proposed harvest areas and road locations will be appropriately adjusted to avoid conflicts. If any historic or archaeological sites are encountered during road

Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

construction or harvest activities, DOF will immediately inform SHPO and take action to protect the findings.

7. Subsurface Resources. All of TVSF Subunit 5A is open to mineral entry and is available for leasing. Mineral potential in this Unit has been rated moderate to low. No active mining claims are established within the sale area. No deleterious effects on subsurface activities are anticipated.

G. Costs and benefits

Local commercial logging operators and their customers will benefit from the inflow of raw timber into the market. In addition to generating royalties to the State's general fund, the proposed sales will create economic benefits for the communities of Fairbanks and Nenana and other locations in Alaska. The local business community will receive direct economic benefit from providing support services for the operators through sales of fuel, food, housing, medical and miscellaneous supplies. Local residents may receive an indirect benefit through any local taxes paid by the operator and employees during the timber harvest operations.

The sales are also expected to benefit the local economy by providing jobs. It will have a positive impact on local employment by generating numerous man-hours of work associated with the harvest and transportation of wood products from this sale. Additionally, the public may benefit from additional access to personal use fuelwood areas, as home heating costs remain high in Interior Alaska.

Minimal negative effects are expected on fish and wildlife habitat or water quality due to the mid to upper slope landscape position of these sales and the retention of adjacent seed source which may provide additional travel corridors for wildlife.

VI. PUBLIC REVIEW

The public and agencies are invited to comment on this Preliminary Best Interest Finding. Objections or comments pertaining to the proposed action must be received in writing by the DOF Fairbanks-Delta Area Office **by 4:30 PM AKDT Friday, August 23, 2024** in order to ensure consideration for review. Comments should be mailed to the State of Alaska, Division of Forestry & Fire Protection, 3700 Airport Way, Fairbanks, AK 99709 or by email to andrew.allaby@alaska.gov. For more information you may contact Andrew Allaby, Fairbanks-Delta Area Resource Forester, at 907-451-2603 or andrew.allaby@alaska.gov. To be eligible to appeal the final decision, a person must have provided written comment **by 4:30 PM AKDT Friday, August 23, 2024**.

VII. PUBLIC NOTICE

This PBIF will be publicly noticed in compliance with AS 38.05.945. Notice will be posted on the Alaska Online Public Notice System, and both physical and electronic notices will be mailed to previous timber sale bidders as well as any property owners or business interests known to the Division in the proposed sale area. Notice will also be posted on the Division of Forestry public webpage.

VIII. ALTERNATIVES AND DISCUSSION

There are 4 possible alternatives to consider for this project area. A discussion of each of the alternatives follows. All alternatives are consistent with the area plan and applicable statutes and regulations.

1. To continue the sale(s) as proposed.

This alternative meets the objectives of the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and DNR's constitutional mandate, and is consistent with the land classification. It also meets the silvicultural objective of improving forest vigor, provides for a value-added end product and creates additional jobs in Alaska due to the combination logging and trucking. This alternative also complies with the management objectives of the TVSF Management Plan for Subunit 5A.

2. To modify the sale(s) by making them smaller or larger.

The proposed sale units are logical settings for typical commercial logging equipment in Interior Alaska. The sizes of these sales are designed to be large enough to be economically viable considering access development and mobilization costs and distance to processing facilities. Sales within this size range are appropriately balanced to maintain other resource values as well as provide economic benefits to the Tanana Valley.

3. Defer the sale of this timber to a later date.

Deferring harvest to a later date would fail to meet many of the objectives of the sale program. One of the main objectives is to make State-owned timber consistently available to the timber industry.

4. Do not offer this timber for 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, deny making a source of raw materials available to the local wood products industry, and would delay the harvest of mature trees, prior to the onset of disease or insect infestation. Decay and senescence of mature birch trees results in the loss of economic value.

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 140 acres of birch fuelwood and spruce sawlog as proposed in Alternative One and 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); and AS 41.17.010-.950 and 11 AAC 95 (Forest Resources and Practices Statutes and Regulations).

To be eligible to participate in any appeal or request for reconsideration of the final finding, a person must be affected by the decision, and must have submitted comment to the preliminary finding and decision during the comment period.

If you have any questions, please contact Fairbanks-Delta Area Resource Forester, Andrew Allaby, andrew.allaby@alaska.gov, 907-451-2603.

X. SIGNATURE

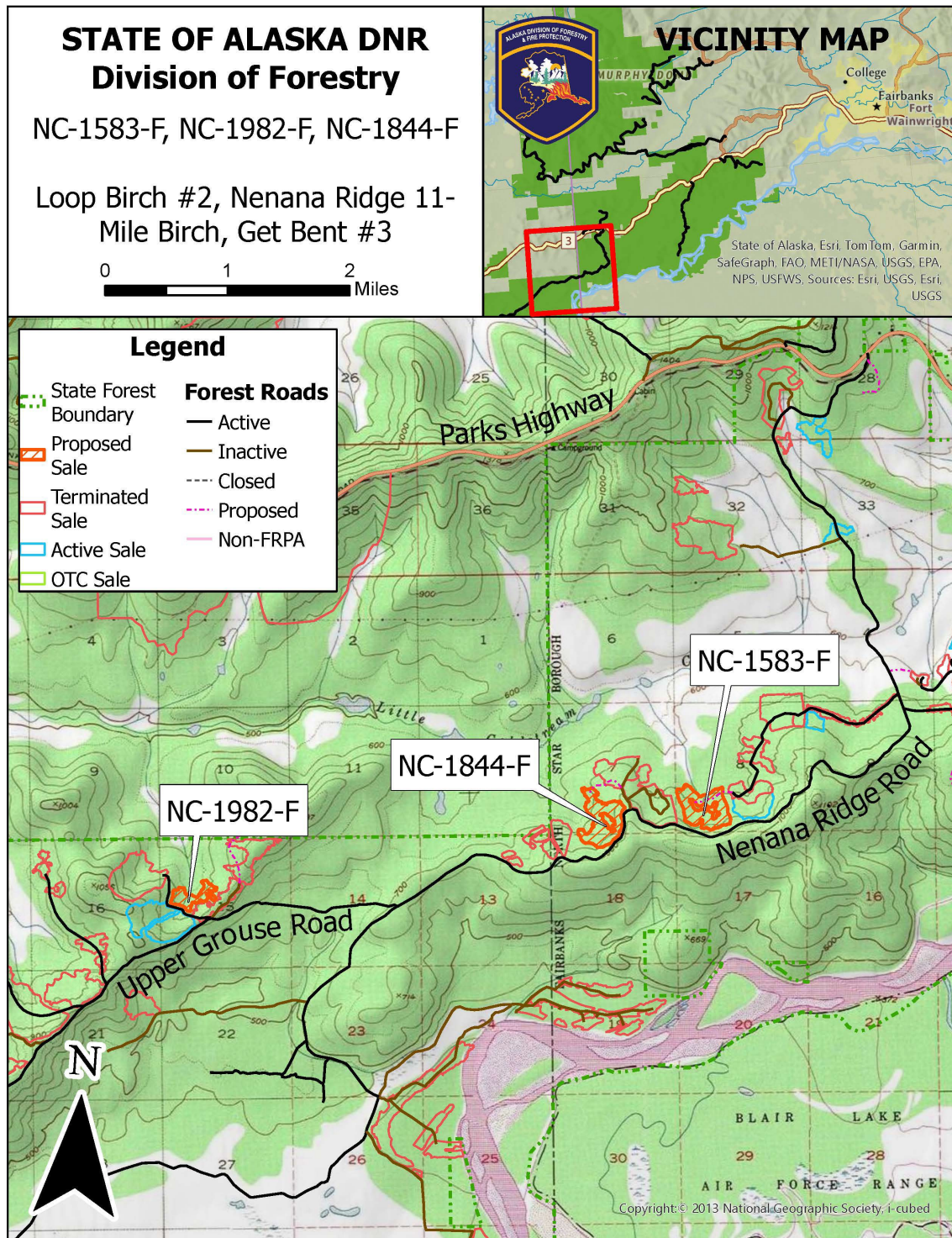
Kevin Meany
Northern Region Forester
Division of Forestry & Fire Protection

Date

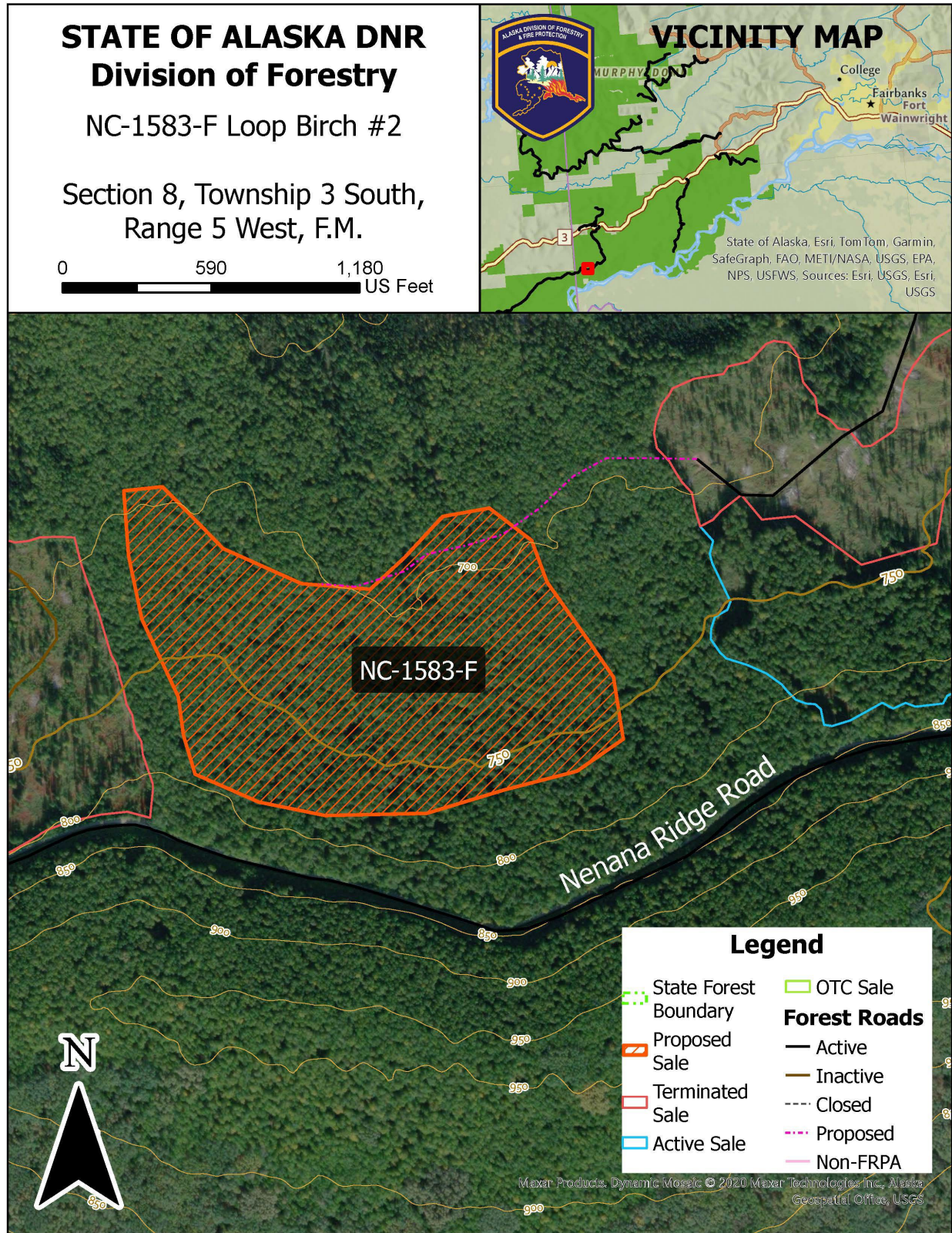
Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

XI. ATTACHMENTS

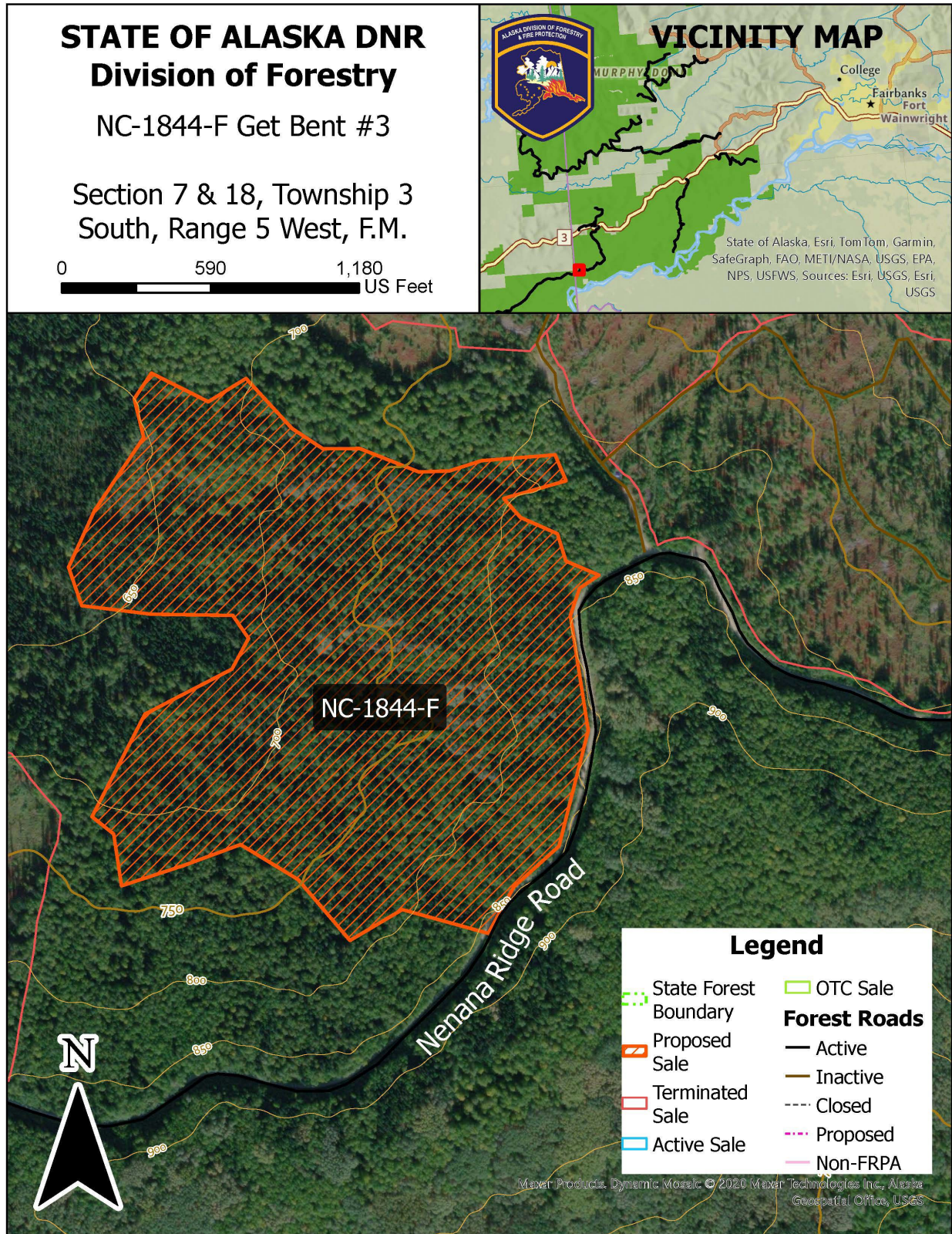
Maps of the proposed project area follow.



Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding



Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding



Nenana Ridge Mixed Timber Sales
Preliminary Best Interest Finding

