Tanana Valley State Forest

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

May 17, 2012

Fairbanks DNR Large Conference Room

6:00 – 9:00 pm

Welcome and Introductions: Mark Eliot, Regional Forester. Mark noted the inclusion of the Preliminary Best Interest Decision for a Long Term Timber Sale for Biomass Utilization in Tok, Alaska. He said the Preliminary Best Interest Decision is significant. Each sale in support of this finding will be up for review and comment and a best interest finding and determination.

CAC Members Present/Representation

Mark Eliot, DNR Regional Forester

Brad Cox, Value-Added Processing

Paul Karzmarcyk, Fish and Wildlife Interests

Tom Malone, Forest Science Chair

Kathy Morgan, Alaska Native Community

Dan Rees, Private Forest Users

Jim Sackett, Regional Representative – Lower Tanana Valley

Chris Stark, Environmental Interests

Thomas Nerbonne, Regional Representative – Upper Tanana Valley

CAC Members Absent

Jack DiMarchi, Mining Interests

Guests

Ben Beste, AP & T

Jan Dawe,

Thomas Deerfield, Dalson Energy

Claire Doig, Forest and Land Management (Forest Consultant)

Al Edgren, DOF Delta Area Forester

Tom Ervin, AP&T

Jeff Hermanns, DOF Tok Area Forester

Doug Hanson, DOF Resource Forester

Lissa Hughes, Northern Alaska Environmental Center

Tom Paragi, Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Biologist

Alice Pharr, Private Citizen

Priscilla Pharr, Private Citizen

Kathryn “KT” Pyne, DOF Fairbanks Area Forester

Dave Stancliff, AP&T

Jim Schwarber, DOF Forest Resources Program Manager (Acting) / Forest Planner

Brian Young, DOF Fairbanks Area Resource Forester

Julie Smith, DNR Public Information Center, scribe extraordinaire

Telephone: Iva, Ben

Old Business

1. Review of Minutes from 4.05.2012 meeting

Mark noted the last meeting resulted in extensive minutes and were followed by long comments that were difficult to incorporate into the minutes. Mark still has those comments, but didn't add them to the minutes. What changes are needed to the minutes?

Tom Paragi had a question about page 4 of the minutes where Jeff Hermanns was talking about land designations around Tok. Jeff responded that the land classification for this area is accurate in the Forestry GIS program, but Alaska Mapper is inaccurate.

There were no further questions or changes to the minutes from CAC members or the public.

1. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

New Business

1. DOF Timber Sale Process Review

Mark provided a power-point overview of the timber sale process. The process includes scoping the landscape to look at where administrative areas, harvest activities, and forest management activities can take place. This includes a broad investigation to identify ownership and title and to determine guidance from area plans. DOF staff estimate the economic viability of the land for harvest, subsistence, and the full gamut of forest management activities. Field visits are made to various areas. Staff look at whether an area was included in timber sales in the past 5 years. They strive to list all sales, and bundle smaller sales together. The bottom line is that if a sale is in the best interest of the state, DOF can proceed with an emergency sale.

The five year schedule of timber sales is subject to Chapter 5 of the Alaska Land Act, AS 38.05.113. This statute requires that these timber sales comply with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA). This requires that the land has to be classified before DOF can offer a timber sale on it, and DOF must meet the mandate of sustained yield. The Division has taken conservative approach in managing the cut for the Biomass Utilization Timber Sale in Tok, averaged out on a 10 year basis. After adopting the schedule, DOF will do more detailed plan. Fieldwork will intensify 1 – 2 years out.

Mark said all the timber sale plans are noticed and follow the same procedure as the best interest finding, 30 days for written comments. DOF will incorporate comments and make adjustments to final findings. Those who provide written comments have the right to appeal the final decision, meaning they can go to the Commission for a decision.

Mark said the main reason for this meeting is the preliminary best interest finding, which was just released this morning.

Jim Schwarber introduced himself as the Forest Planner for the Division of Forestry. He said today is the first day of the 30 day comment period on this document. We can host another meeting of the CAC before the 30 day period ends. This is the very beginning of the review process

Thomas Deerfield asked if there would be a scheduled meeting of the CAC in Tok during the period.

Jim Schwarber said there is a Tok community informational meeting scheduled in Tok on May 31. The CAC could be added to that meeting or a separate meeting could be scheduled. The comment period ends June 18.

Jeff Hermanns said Tok meetings will give people a more grounded sense of what this is about. Many board members haven't spent a lot of time in Tok.

Tom Paragi said there will be an information meeting at the Noel Wien Library on biomass.

Chris Stark had a series of questions:

* Page 5, 2nd paragraph lists three requirements. The second requirement is related to manufacturing. Two of the requirements don’t seem to apply. Jeff Hermanns responded that unemployment in Tok is very high, in the range of 20 – 25%.
* The area overlaps tribes. Have you consulted with the tribes? (p. 5)
* What is the area of firebreak? Mark said the area includes 39,000 acres of forest.
* P. 9 above #2. Economic operating area. All that land has timber that Tom can use? All forested? Timberland acres? Doug Hanson replied yes.
* P. 10 fire. Jeff said there is no statistical information to indicate fire is increasing.
* P. 15 projected habitat: 1st paragraph. Mark responded that when fire hits hardwoods it moves back to the ground.
* P. 17 – subsistence paragraph 2 – road access is a big negative to a lot of people. Environmental groups don't like roads. Acknowledge in the findings that for some people this is a negative. Jim Schwarber suggested adding wording like "Some public will like increased access, other's won't." Tom Paragi suggested asking the community where roads are preferred and not preferred. Doug Hanson noted that the only proposed roads are in the winter. All other roads are already existing. Jeff Hermanns said there will definitely be all seasons roads because can't harvest without them. Location of roads will be determined in the Five Year plans.
* P. 17 – scenic resources – will the area be reforested with aspen? Jeff Hermanns said part of the concept is spruce will come in no matter what. Many of the stands targeted will not be saw log stands or saw log sites, but will be pre-pole sites. Part of the goal is to make sure aspen comes back. Spruce will come back no matter what. The challenge is finding a way to harvest in a way that we don't end up with a carpet of spruce trees. We want to delay spruce coming in. Tom Paragi said black spruce comes back after fire, but the potential for it coming back after mechanical harvest may be different. Tom Malone said that if the mineral soil isn’t exposed, we won't get white spruce. Black spruce WILL grow on organic soil because they will open a little without fire, but there won't get a carpet if they are not encouraged.
* How many truckloads are expected? Brad Cox said 1,000 truckloads. Chris Stark said we should document what is expected so we can estimate truck traffic and diesel use.
* P. 18 – transportation. Who is paying for roads? Jeff Hermanns said we don't know yet. With most timber sales roads are not built with state funded dollars.
* What trumps, surface or subsurface resources (mining)?
* P. 20 - Superior Pellets has a 25 year contract? No. They have a 10 year contract. Brian Young said many contractors end up with more than 10 years. Chris asked if this includes contracts on the state forest? Jeff Hermanns said yes. They're going for saw timber. This plan is not for saw timber.
* P. 21- 1st full paragraph: will use log at that price for round wood products or biomass? Jeff Hermanns said the intent is to stay out of saw log units to the extent feasible, looking at areas with an estimated 3 – 5% sawlogs. Very small percentage. Jeff said the goal is integrated industry where we utilize what has not been utilized before along with what has been used before, like saw logs. Brad Cox said all this needs to be simplified. Easy is sometimes the best option. As a mill operator, he needs to know what will be in place. Al Edgren said it wouldn't it make sense for saw logs to be offered to a mill because of the higher value, and we should market at the highest value. Brad said that would require sorting and space for the logs. Jeff said local mills are part of the picture. Brad said interfering with the contractor's process is a problem. If the contractor also has a mill, it’s more likely to make highest use of different logs.
* Tok School will get additional 40acres? Jeff Hermanns said the school is actually only using about 15 acres a year. Additional to the other uses in the paragraph. Wording needs to be tightened up here. Jeff said there is currently 7 years worth of hazardous fuels and other unutilized resources. Don't expect to ever have to harvest, will be residual use. This paragraph needs a rewrite. Mark said the goal is to try to paint picture of total use in the area. Jeff said he appreciates the detailed comments.

Mark asked if there were any other questions or comments?

Dave Stancliff noted there had been prior evacuations for fuel threats. 6 times in last decade. Huge cost. The Tok community was at risk and evacuated because of the hazard presented by this fuel. Question to Mark – is there a state policy or regulation for classification for communities at risk and economically disadvantaged? What percentage of people on food stamps, welfare, unemployment? This auction being considered is more than trees, but is also about the social and economic health of the community. Also, if comparing truck traffic, also consider what trucks are carrying and environmental risk of transporting fuel long distances over slippery roads vs. transporting organic materials 6 miles. Need to look at the environmental positives.

Thomas Deerfield commented on the 536 acre estimate and said the actual is probably 400 – 800 acres depending on what the stands are. Stating an exact number like 536 seems odd. Most likely that there will be significant other sources from clearing and other sources. The best interest finding makes it sound like the sole source of fuel is this contract, but this is not necessarily true. Some mention of the risk of doing nothing should be included in the report. The set of risks include wildfire, economic decline, business closure, school closure, and these risks are quite high. There are ways to include these risks in economic analysis. Can do simulations to estimate these risks, the risks of doing nothing.

Tom Irwin said the Tok School is surrounded by an almost unlimited supply of biomass materials. The issue is getting it out of the woods. Mills are set up for logging, not biomass. Direct benefit to the Tok community if move forward with this.

Dave Stancliff said there is also a benefit to wildlife because in much of the forest moose and caribou can't walk because the forest is too thick. No moose are hunted in the Tok Triangle because the forest is too tangled. Wildlife lives on the edges. In the Tok Triangle, most wildlife is on the trails, where things are opened up. Would like to see from Fish and Game how many moose are harvested from the area pre and post managed forest in the tok area. Thinks moose population and harvest will increase with biomass effort. There are no moose there now, so it can only get better. Tom Paragi said that even if improve habitat there may be no difference. Moose need 5 – 12 square miles. Numbers of moose won't increase significantly. Big factor is predation, not habitat.

Jeff Hermanns said he wanted to talk about the harvest area. Realistically, the harvest area will probably be in a 6 mile circle around Tok. The Tok Triangle is private land, 25 square miles of state land designated for settlement. DNR land sales has agreed to let them harvest the biomass to remove 80% of the fuel in those sections. This is land not designated forestry, so this effort would not affect the annual allowable cut calculation. Land sales thinks this will help them with future sales because road development will help with future sale of state land. Contractors will probably do island cutting, and will leave bigger trees. In 40 acres, they will leave 40 islands of various sizes. Tom Paragi said it would be good to be thoughtful about roads, views, and creating an infrastructure for future land sales.

Chris Stark referred to map 3 and asked what is a sapling? Doug Hanson said a sapling is a tree less than 5" in diameter, any kind of tree. Thomas Deerfield says it doesn’t matter what size because will be turned in chips. Jeff Hermanns said the Tok Triangle is mix of spruce and aspen.

Tom Malone referred to page 18, harvest methods and noted paragraphs 3 and 4 describe processes in getting wood to the plant. On the top of page 22, the report indicates whole tree harvesting is the intent of this study. Jeff Hermanns said whole tree harvesting is what makes sense for this project.

Tom Paragi said if burning primarily chips, will lose fines and needles. Those are also a nutrient source. Seems like if can flail that off, there is that much less "junk" later and these nutrients stay in the forest. Jeff Hermanns said they can't afford to handle those trees like that. Each tree is so small, the cost would skyrocket. Feasibility of logging non-commercial timber, is to move it fast and grind it on site. Some will be blown out and broadcast from the process itself. 90% of everything that gets done will probably be chipped in the woods. Too costly to move as trees. Best to leave biomass in decks for a year, and then chip and move the next year. Tom Paragi asked about the risk of beetles? Jeff Hermanns said they’re studying this with various trials and bait stations. They’re learning. Leaving decks for a year and being ahead is money in the bank.

Dan Rees said he doesn't see that the state is dictating to APT how to do the work. That will come in the 5 year plan. Technology is going to change. The intent and the concept of the amount harvested and following FRPA is significant. Mark Eliot said if this passes, it becomes possible for the community to invest in infrastructure to participate in the process. Dan said the state should not be in business of dictating how the contractor would move forward. Jeff Hermanns agreed.

Mark asked whether it is in the state's best interest to negotiate a contract. Jeff Hermanns asked what is the highest and best use of a tree. The answer changes over time. Need to look at the price of firewood. The forest land use plan has a shorter window, requires more specific plans.

Brad Cox said that from the industry perspective, he’s pretty excited. The project will expand the infrastructure. Pretty pleased that the state is pushing this forward. Could provide an estimate of the benefit related to electrical prices. Preliminary percentage drop? Thomas Deerfield said that is a good question. No answer yet. Goal is to reduce rates by 30 – 40%. Hope to exceed that. Replacing $ 4 million of diesel with $ 1 million of local wood chips, but lots of factors. Also many other benefits to the local community. Northern Economics is working on this. Within 6 – 8 weeks of having a more clear answer.

Brad said looking at school projects, even if a wash economically, the local jobs would make it a benefit to the community. Thomas Deerfield said there is also the value of the heat. Use the heat that is created when make electricity, create a district heating system of combined heat and power, another chapter about to be developed.

7:50 pm break until 8:00 pm.

Mark asked if there were any more comments or questions? Paul Karzmarcyk asked who is the audience for the document? Written by foresters and biomass proponents with a consumptive wildlife bent to it. Economics and health impact analyses are similar. There are other more peripheral benefits. People are concerned about trees, migratory songbirds, and charismatic insects like butterflies. A broader base would result in more interest. Tom Paragi added fish habitat, that there would be more opportunity at the FLUP level. Paul asked again who is the audience? Others might benefit from more diversity in the document. Tom Paragi agreed that this is a very focused group. Paul noted we're talking about reducing electricity costs in the local community, looking at western economic models benefitting local communities rather than competing.

Mark said the target audience for this is the State of Alaska.

Dave Stancliff said human life trumps it all. Removing dangers in a community subject to so much risk. Jeff Hermanns said he knows there are death zones where fire can cut off escape routes. He is designing escape routes from dead end roads as part of these plans. There is a concern for public safety as well as biomass harvest.

Jim Schwarber said he is helping with public process in forestry. As substantive or general comments come in, the sooner the better. Will make changes in real time as changes come in. Send comments to Mark in an e-mail or other means to get information to us sooner not later.

Chris Stark asked about the process.

Jim Schwarber said there will be 30 days to make comments on the preliminary finding. Comments will be reviewed and the document will be adjusted and finalized into a best interest finding. This will probably take a few weeks. Those who make formal comments have 20 days to appeal the final best interest finding. Best case is this will move forward.

Chris Stark asked if the CAC have another formal opportunity to review the final best interest finding. Jim Schwarber said he wants to work closely with the committee. Chris would like to see the last document.

Tom Paragi said normally the CAC doesn't meet in summer. The consultant report will be coming in next 6 - 8 weeks. When should next CAC meeting be scheduled?

Brad Cox said the CAC should meet before the 30 days are over, to review comments and have input.

Mark Eliot said DOF will address comments as they come in. Jeff Hermanns asked if there is interest in meeting before the deadline in June to review comments and look at it on the ground in Tok?

Jim Schwarber said it is up to the committee if it wants to function as a committee and have a committee voice. Public comments can be shared with the CAC.

Mark Eliot said a copy of this document was dropped off at the library. He'll also be at meeting at library on Monday with more copies.

Mark asked if anyone on the phone had comments or questions. Clare said thank you for moving this along. Will be submitting written comments related to the acreage issue and appraisal issue. Won't get into that tonight because of time issues.

Jeff Hermanns said DNR lands information came out last week. He looked at the plan for Tok. Looking at additions of lands to be added as forestry would add acreage allowed to be cut. The big story is settlement lands. He did a flight around the area. Current timber operations are begging for fire-killed wood. Market for that is endless. Millions of cords of fire-killed wood from fires several years ago. Road built last winter will be part of that. Difficulties with crossing Tanana. Hoping to have 5 year schedule of timber sales out soon

1. Delta Area Update

Al Edgren said nothing but good news in Delta. Final public review draft has been issued. Comments are due by June 19. Best way to comment is to e-mail Al or Mike Reggear. Al said he appreciates what Jeff is doing. He is breaking new ground. Delta and other communities can learn from his experience.

1. Hastings Access Development

KT Pyne reported on the Hastings access development. She said the process has been delayed and she is working with the borough regarding some of the comments. A public meeting is planned. FLUPS are in place. There will be a sealed bid auction in June. Question is who trumps, bear baiting or forest roads?

Priscilla Pharr, participating via phone, asked if KT mentioned the Himalaya area. KT said there was some public comment that there may have been some historical site exposure, which requires further process. She went back to the public comment asking for additional information. Some of the delay is due to this process. She is also working with the borough for road access and to set up the next public meeting. Priscilla asked if forestry is involved with wood cutting area across from Haystack. KT said this is a GVEA right-of-way. They are not offering firewood in this area due to the steep incline. Cutting to private property for electrical lines. KT is hoping to get all the permits related to the Hastings Fire timber before doing the construction and creation a forest timber extraction road. There will be opportunities for public comment through the borough process and the state process. KT said she understands there are concerns related to the narrow roads. Priscilla said there are concerns related to the date and concern that certain agencies that should be involved aren’t participating. KT said Alyeska is receiving the public notice and working with the borough.

Adjournment

Mark Eliot said the next meeting will be in the fall.

Adjoined at 9:15 pm.