

Susitna Valley Forest Management Plan

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

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Agenda

Framing the discussion

Group Expectations

Group discussion

Identify next steps

Project Background

The Division of Forestry and Fire Protection is establishing a new Susitna Valley Forest management plan. This plan is created to replace the Susitna Forestry guidelines created in 1991. The 1991 guidelines, being over 30 years old, need to be revised. The intention was to supersede the 1991 Guidelines sooner, within 10 years, but that never happened. Other than forestry land use, the area also has mineral resources that have been mined for decades. Rivers and lakes make great opportunities for recreation such as hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking and camping in these areas, along with other land-based recreation.

Purpose: To provide stakeholders local to the area an opportunity to contribute considerations and recommendations regarding the management of forest resources within the Susitna Valley and to include this perspective in the development of a management plan draft prior to the public review period.

Expected outcome: A summary of recommendations and considerations related to forest management within the Susitna Valley from the perspective of the local timber industry land users. This discussion is intended to capture the perspective of timber and forest product industries in the area regarding the management of land and resources, and values and uses that are important to this group and your constituents.

Topic: forest products and timber industry focus group. What solutions or concepts can facilitate the co-existence of forestry activities and other uses within the Susitna Valley?

Rules of Engagement (adapted from National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation frameworks)

- The moderator will guide the discussion but refrain from participating.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. Once you have shared, wait for two others to contribute before weighing in again.
- The discussion stays focused on the issue at hand (forest management policy within the Susitna Valley).

- Maintain an atmosphere for discussion and analysis of our options. This is a discussion, not a debate.
- Ask questions to gain understanding/clarity.
- Give constructive feedback. We are here to talk about ideas, not people.
- We will work together toward describing balanced resource management within the Susitna Valley.
- We may not make it through all the discussion questions today. Is the group open to following up virtually?

Discussion Questions

Introductions: What is your name and what is one thing you hope to accomplish in this conversation today?

- Andrew Traxler. Find out if changes are being made in this management plan to allow for long-term timber harvest, like have been possible with the borough. More cost effective to harvest timber using borough or state-maintained road systems (i.e. future timber sales should be as close as possible and use as much as possible existing roads maintained by the Mat-Su Borough or State of Alaska, as opposed to long stretches of forest roads that are less frequently maintained).
- Interested in large-scale areas that small operations can be distributed throughout (e.g. 10 year, 1000 acres sales that are designed to be cut incrementally a 100 acres a year at a time etc).

Now that improvements have been made on West Su access road, there is more access to timber and it makes it more profitable to harvest timber in that area. Having a good road, that is well maintained year round make timber harvest more effective/efficient.

Identify Impacts: How is this group affected by forest management activities? (Consider an additional question: *How has this group been affected by past forest management activities?*)

- There's not much of an industry today: driving safety plan from MSB, doesn't exist anymore. Doesn't limit state activities now
- Timing of harvest opportunities, and access to the timber and access to a great enough volume of timber to harvest. Harvests need to be big enough to generate enough revenue for the logger to invest in building higher standard roads, otherwise timing of harvest and access is extremely limited to the point where everything has to be harvested in a very short timespan
- Limited harvest sizes and large buffer areas
 - DFFP goals to increase max sizes of harvest units within the planning area
 - Buffers on Willer Kash Rd, etc are limiting – the size of the buffer reduces the amount of available timber AND requires additional road building to cross the buffers – which substantially reduces the return on investment for timber sales.
- HB 104 applies to timber management, related to salvage harvest. upon passage did this bill open opportunities for harvest within some of those setback areas
- Looking at the forest, we have a serious problem with one age, and the birch is just “going backwards,” (decadent, overmature) but the spruce isn't regenerating because there hasn't been a disturbance. Perhaps allowing more harvest in areas effected by beetle kill, especially areas with good access, might help scarify the soil and lead to more spruce regeneration.

- Lots of forest in 100-120 year age class, past maturity. Much of the forest are starting to die or decline, and are no longer growing vigorously and able to resist decay. There must have been a widespread disturbance approximately 120 years ago

Considerations: What resources, uses or areas would you like the Division to consider as we are developing management policy for this area?

- Main use of timber in the area is firewood. Currently a massive shortage of firewood because there's a lot of wood just sitting at Mile 78, (estimating 200 log truck loads of dead, down). Lack of available logging trucks, many being used for land clearing etc. not enough depth in terms of fleet, the loss of a single truck to repairs has large impact. Mile 78- Most recent borough harvest that's been completed, wood decked awaiting transport. Expansion of gravel pit on Borough lands
- Log trucks are not easy to get ahold of, they're too
- Accessibility, fuelwood. Higher aspirations for sawlog spruce, but wants to think about what's realistic for implementation. Creating spruce forests for a sawlog industry would require lots of site prep (scarification) and standard replanting following harvest as a standard practice.
- Because log trucks are so hard to get a hold of, and moving along forest road is so slow (curvy, dirt roads) what makes low value timber harvest doable is short turn arounds on delivering wood by truck. For example hauling from Nenana Ridge (250 miles north) is more efficient because almost the whole trip is on the highway,
- Zero lake Rd area seems like the only place for focus on harvest activities, with most road access, but the zero lake road is terrible.
- The truck time on Willer Kash is not feasible for the cost of a truckload of wood
- "Everything in the timber harvest industry is truck time to the highway"
- Higher preference for developing shorter spurs to connect to highway system than for extending roads that are already long and winding.
- Other preference/rational area is in west Susitna. West Susitna parkway gives good access to the highway
- Communities in West Su area are open to forest management/timber harvest. Possibly in response to recent fires. Emphasis on Fish Creek Unit. Ties into recent 1000-acre borough harvest
- For example the 1000 acre harvest – they aren't likely to harvest all 1000 acres – but it's a long-term investment and allows loggers to spend time and money to lay down a solid base – because they know they will use it again and again as they continue to harvest.

Recommendations: What would it look like for forest management activities to be conducted in this area in a way that includes meeting the needs of this group and your constituents?

- It all comes down to opening up larger acreages to harvest. For example a local small logger has a 140 acres sale and allows an operator to operate for 5-6 years in the same location, allows a person to invest in gates, temp lodging, machinery, better roads. The limitations created in 1991 don't support the reality of 2026
- Never much issue with getting access to sawlogs as long as folks are getting enough fuelwood. Firewood demand is so high that it is easy to separate the 1 or 2% percentage of high-quality

sawlogs from lower quality logs that can be used to fuelwood. Implies that firewood demand is much higher than demand for birch sawlogs.

- Is the plan being written right now with the proposed changes—does it seem like what’s been proposed and asked for is realistic from the perspective of a forester?
 - Main goal = provide firewood to people, and maybe expand management activities to the point where scarification and planting to encourage more spruce regeneration, and diverse spruce age structure.
 - I’m not sure what management strategy is the answer, but I think that not harvesting any timber is not the answer. Seems like we would want to make efforts to diversify the ages of forest stands across the landscape.
 - Interest in the idea of making sustainable jet fuel in local communities, but the amount of biomass that would require is not possible. Interest in producing this at Port MacKenzie. Correspondence is underway to look into clearing lands for facilities at the port. Industry contacts say that volume of timber is not available in the area.
 - Sawmill in Talkeetna? A&T at 16 semi-loads and Traxler is at 10 or 12 for the year. Production at both mills is 3x last year, high supply due to parks HWY fire sales. Low quality wood, but price reflects damage/defect. Significant damage from longhorn beetles.
 - Road investment-if DFFP has the option to provide grants to support investment in developing road, a little goes a long way.
 - Even in developing additional forestry roads, there’s a lot of benefit in terms of public access – there is a lot to gain in planning road construction with collaboration in mind – Road Service Areas, Borough, DOT etc. Two miles of West Susitna Access were built to a very high standard with investments from several different organizations and will be used to access Matsu Borough harvests.
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- When draft is released for public review and hold meetings, the whole meeting dissolves into people stating concerns about things that will not happen because FRPA prevents those issues from emerging. Suggests making a video that discusses FRPA protections that could be played at the beginning of public meetings to prevent people from making suggestions that are already standard practice.

Next Steps

If we could not address all the questions in this outline today, the Division will coordinate a follow-up meeting, provided the group agrees to do so. If members of this group would like to share additional information that was not captured by this discussion opportunity, please feel free to share those comments in writing by email to dnr.dof.matsuplanning@alaska.gov or by mail to:

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Next opportunities for comment will be during the public review period, although we are happy to talk about the project whenever you have questions or want to give us feedback. Upcoming benchmarks include the public review period later this year.

In the meantime, more information is available on the project webpage:

[Susitna Valley Forest Management Plan](#)

Please share your comments or questions with the planning team by sending a message to: dnr.dof.matsuplanning@alaska.gov.