

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



**SOUTHEAST AREA
HAINES STATE FOREST**

**PRELIMINARY BEST INTEREST FINDING
FOR**

**SKI HILL
NSE - 1597**

July 2022

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Abbreviations

ADEC	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
ADNR	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
BIF	Best interest finding
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
MMBF	Million board feet
POG	Productive old growth
POW	Prince of Wales
POWIAP	Prince of Wales Island Area Plan
ROW	Right-of-way
SESF	Southeast State Forest
SESFMP	Southeast State Forest Management Plan
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
UA	University of Alaska
USFS	United States Forest Service

I. PROPOSED ACTION

The Division of Forestry & Fire Protection (DOF) is proposing to offer for sale approximately 1,195 acres of mixed age stands of Western Hemlock and Sitka Spruce from state lands along the ridge to the east of Mosquito Lake Road locally known as “Ski Hill”. The volume to be offered totals approximately 10.76 million board feet (MMBF) of timber. DOF would sell the timber over a 10-to-20-year period as negotiated sales under AS 38.05.115 or competitively under AS 38.05.118 and AS 38.05.120 to local commercial operators selling and manufacturing timber in Alaska and for personal use. The land covered by this Preliminary Best Interest Finding (PBIF) appeared in the 2020-2024 and the 2022-2026 Five Year Forest Management Schedules for the Haines State Forest.

The management objectives for the proposed timber sales are:

1. To follow the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) constitutional mandate to encourage the development of the State’s renewable resources, making them available for maximum use consistent with the public interest. Sustain and promote a healthy, long-term timber industry in the state, through providing a secure source of timber for harvest that produces raw materials for local manufacturing plants (e.g., mills) while protecting other resources such as fish and wildlife.
2. To contribute to forest growth and vigor by harvesting merchantable timber while protecting and maintaining other resource values. The actions authorized under this decision will follow the constitutional mandate of sustained yield and shall adhere to multiple use management as described in the Haines State Forest Management Plan (HSFMP).
3. Create diversity in regenerating stands by creating multistory stands of mixed age conifers and deciduous trees in the area.
4. To provide for the continued development of forest access and multiple use of resources.
5. To help the State’s economy by providing royalties to the state in the form of stumpage receipts, as well as contributions to local economies through wages, purchases, jobs, and business.

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 Haines Office filed as NSE - 1597.

IV. SCOPE OF DECISION

This PBIF is part of the 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 allowed use, and what other uses must be considered when designing and implementing sales. Subsequent land use decisions must be consistent with the area plans. The area in this PBIF is covered by the Haines State Forest Management Plan. The finding also considers the Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. There are no Community Wildfire Protection Plans in this area. The proposed area is within the Haines Borough and this finding considers the applicable aspects of the Haines Borough Comprehensive Plan.

Step 2: Five-year Schedule of Timber Sales (AS 38.05.113). The Haines 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:

- 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. A person affected by the final decision who provided timely written comment or public hearing testimony on the preliminary decision may appeal it, in accordance with 11 AAC 02.

Step 4: Forest Land Use Plans (AS 38.05.112). Prior to authorizing harvest of timber on any area greater than 10 acres, the DOF must adopt a site-specific Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for the harvest area. The DOF projects it will produce a series of FLUPS over time covering discrete operating areas within the overall sale area described by this PBIF. A site specific FLUP will be adopted prior to the sale of a subset of the sale area. In this manner forest management practices can evolve as needed based on additional information gained during each operational period allowing additional public and agency review of the proposed operations in each sale area. 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 a FLUP, DOF will offer the timber for sale as presented in the FLUP by negotiating some sales and/or auctioning competitive sales with purchasers. Each sale contract negotiated or awarded after bidding signed by the contractor will include stipulations to ensure compliance with the best interest finding, current 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 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

Portion of sections 11, 13, 14, 23, and 24 within Township 28 South Range 55 East, Copper River Meridian, United States Geological Service Quadrangle Skagway B-3, 1:63,360. See attached maps (Appendix A).

B. Title status

The sale area is located on general grant lands within the Haines State Forest. These lands at one time were part of the Original Mental Health Land Trust. A court settlement approved on December 6, 1994, removed these lands from the Mental Health Trust and reclassified them as general grant lands. This land is subject to the Haines State Forest Management Plan (HSFMP) and lies within Subunit 1c of Management Unit 1, Kelsall River. This subunit has a land use classification of Forestry, and this action is consistent with the guidelines for the unit and subunit established in the HSFMP.

C. Land use planning, classification, and management intent

The proposed area is within the Haines State Forest Management Plan (HSFMP) in the following units. The land use classification is listed for each unit.

Unit 1 – Kelsall River

Classification – Forest Land

Subunit – 1c (Kelsall River Lowlands) the HSFMP specifically states this area “will provide resources for the small timber sale and personal use programs.”

This subunit is closed to leasehold location.

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

The Haines Borough Comprehensive Plan encompasses this area with a land classification of Multiple – Resource Use Emphasis.

D. Current access and land use

Access to the area is across state highway, state secondary, and municipal secondary roads as follows: Haines Highway Alternate Route 7, Mosquito Lake Road, and River View Road respectively at a point that intersects with an existing inactive forest road.

Current land use in the subunit is regenerating forest surrounded by private residences along River View Road, the western portion of the proposed harvest area.

Water use in the sale area consists of four surface water collection sites for residential use along River View Road.

A community center is located across Mosquito Lake Road at its junction with River View Road, also to the west of the proposed harvest area. To the east the subunit is bordered by the Chilkat River and the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve.

E. Background and description of proposal

1. Background: The HSFMP describes management intent for the proposed subunit to “provide resources for the small timber sale and personal use programs.” This proposal is designed to specifically meet this management intent.
2. Timber volume and sustained yield: The sale area is comprised of approximately 1,500 acres of the Haines State Forest (HSF) which is estimated to contain 11 MMBF of merchantable timber over the proposed harvest period. This volume of timber could provide approximately 500 thousand board feet (MBF)/year to the local market for the next 20 years. The proposed harvest volume will contribute to current sustainable allowable harvest of 58.8 MMBF over a ten-year period representing 9.2% of the calculated maximum volume available. This action alone and in combination with other timber sales that are sold will be within the allowable cut and comply with sustained yield requirements.
3. Harvest unit design: Timber sales will be offered from four adjacent areas starting with the “Ski Hill Opener” area, 1597-A. Harvest units will be designed to facilitate ground harvest systems currently present in the area and are projected to be in the range of 1 to 40 acres in size. Harvest prescriptions will include a mixture of even age and selective harvest. Unit design will reflect consideration of the dispersion of merchantable timber, topography, and long-term goals of timber stand development and area resource use relative to feasibility. The even age harvest areas will be designed with a goal to not exceed 10 acres in size in the proposed harvest area. The management block conditions will be considered during the adoption of the individual FLUPs with respect to the BIF objectives. A progression of timber sales will be made available following the development of a FLUP for the offered area; the projected order is Ski Hill Ridge, Ski Hill Knob, and Ski Hill South, 1597-B, C, and D, respectively. Offering the sales in this manner will allow periodic review of the harvest plan and objectives by the public and agencies to provide flexibility in the planning process.
 - a. Reforestation and site preparation: The sale area will be reforested in compliance with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.375-.390). Natural regeneration will be the primary method of reforestation with supplemental site-specific planting as determined necessary. It is expected that residual trees from selective harvest methods will contribute to successful forest regeneration throughout the area. Site specific reforestation will be proscribed in the FLUPs.
 - b. Access design and construction: Access design, construction, and maintenance will comply with the Forest Resources and Practices regulations (11 AAC 95.285-.355).
 - Mosquito Lake Road is a two-lane surfaced road maintained by the State of Alaska providing residential and commercial truck access from the Haines Highway to the junction of River View Road. River View Road is a double wide two-lane unimproved gravel road maintained by the Haines Borough through a local

service area agreement capable of accommodating commercial truck use. The harvest area will be accessed from the junction of the existing inactive forest road with River View Road. A stream crossing exists approximately 440 feet east of the River View Road junction along the inactive forest road. This site will require the installation of a typical culvert road crossing structure to maintain existing flow patterns. No additional stream locations along the inactive road system have been identified in the sale area, however, should they be located during the FLUP development process they will be addressed in that document.

- Approximately 1,200 feet of new road alignment connecting two segments of the existing inactive forest road system is projected to be needed for contemporary access.
 - Distribution of harvest activities across the landscape will consider feasible forest use activities such as subsistence and recreation, along with potential wildlife enhancing applications associated with harvest methods such as increasing browse vegetation for moose.
 - Mainline harvest roads will remain open throughout the harvest period providing public and commercial access to the area.
 - Harvest spur roads and/or skid trails will be closed following harvest operations and allowed to naturally regenerate forest vegetation.
- c. Appraisal method: DOF will appraise the timber value in compliance with 11 AAC 71.092. In 2018 a comprehensive forest inventory of the area was completed providing the necessary forest information to support accurate timber volume and value assessment in this sale area. Individual sale value will be based on the local small sale program transactional values developed over the past 25 years on the Haines State Forest. The specific selling values are reassessed periodically and adjusted as markets develop around the forest products. This appraisal method is projected to remain valid during the proposed sale period.

F. Resources and management

1. Timber

- a. Timber stand composition and structure: Mixed aged young stands of Sitka Spruce and Western Hemlock interspersed with older stands of primarily Western Hemlock.
- b. Stand silvics: The majority of forest in this sale area is regenerating stands following harvest activities that occurred from the 1950's to the early 1970's. The previous harvest activities included clear cut practices over much of the area though specific stands of young Western Hemlock existing at the time were entirely avoided. The resulting forest has 30 to 50 years of growth in the young Sitka Spruce/Western Hemlock even age harvest sites with 70 to 150 years of growth in the dispersed residual stands of primarily Western Hemlock forest.
- c. Topography and Soils: The proposed sale will be designed and managed to prevent significant impairment of the land and water with respect to renewable resources (AS 41.17.060(c)(5)). Soil composition in the area is identified as 70 % Tolstoi-Foad complex with 27% Kupreanof-Foad complex in the sale area. These soils share characteristics such as shallow well drained soils supporting forest growth on slopes

typically ranging from 40 to 70%. Limitations associated with forest development can be depth to bed rock restricting root growth and impacting road building cost.

2. Agriculture. The community center on Mosquito Lake Road cultivates a small community use garden and homeowners in the area have gardens for personal use.
3. Wildlife habitat and harvest. No known critical wildlife habitat concerns exist in the proposed harvest area. This area may be used for hunting of small game and trapping but is not known to be actively occurring. No bear harvest permits have been issued in the area in recent years. Moose are likely to use the area and may be hunted at times though the area is not identified as critical habitat for moose. Timber harvest activities will be reviewed for opportunities to enhance forest growth characteristics that may improve habitat conditions for species commonly present in this forest type. Harvest methods applied to the sale area can be evaluated during the FLUP development process to consider appropriate scarification requirements, for example, related to suggestions received from state habitat biologists.
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). There are no known fish bearing waters within the proposed harvest area.
5. Recreation, tourism, and scenic resources. Recreational activities in the area may include hunting, hiking, and subsistence use. This area is not known to have unique tourism values nor are commercial recreation activities currently operating in this area. Visual impacts from harvest activities are expected to be low due to harvest design and limited view of the area from nearby outlooks.
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. The 2020-2024 Five Year Forest Management Schedule which included the Ski Hill project area proposal was distributed to and reviewed by the SHPO. DOF received no comments from the SHPO identifying areas of interest or concern in the proposed sale area. If 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 construction or harvest activities, DOF will immediately inform SHPO and take action to protect the findings.
7. Subsurface Resources. The harvest area does not contain mineral claims. This subunit is closed to leasehold location.

G. Costs and benefits

The harvest area contains an extensive inactive road system that will support a mixture of harvest activities. Access to this area of forest is projected to facilitate a dependable long-term supply of timber to the local timber products market. The current local market for timber products includes saw logs, house logs, and firewood. This sale volume may provide opportunities to expand the local use of timber resources from the HSF.

Opportunities exist for stand growth enhancement to the regenerating forest through harvest activities that may also improve habitat for common wildlife found in this forest type. Selective harvesting of these stands will open the canopy allowing more sunlight to reach the forest floor and contribute to greater brush and shrub species growth. The increased surface growth would provide more abundant browse for area ungulate populations for a period following harvest activities.

Personal use timber sales will be feasible by improving general access to the forest along the reconstructed road system.

Increased access to forest resources for uses such as subsistence and recreation will occur supporting the forest management goals identified in the HSFMP for this subunit.

The State will receive timber sale revenue throughout the harvest activity period to continue support of active forest management through small local timber sale receipts on the HSF.

The economic conditions of the community in the general vicinity of this proposed sale are fair to poor. The current local economy is based on fishing, tourism, and logging. Several small mobile dimension sawmills operate in the valley and are expected to benefit from timber sales in the area.

The tourism industry has not utilized this area in the past and no adverse impacts to the local tourism industry from the proposed harvest activities are anticipated. The sale area does not contain anadromous fish habitat and no resident fish populations have been identified in the sale area, therefore no adverse impacts to the local fishing industry are expected.

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 Haines Office by **4:00pm August 30, 2022** in order to ensure consideration for review. Comments should be mailed to the State of Alaska, Division of Forestry, P.O. Box 263, Haines Alaska, 99827, or by email to greg.palmieri@alaska.gov. Individuals with questions regarding the PBIF or the review process may also contact the Haines Office of the DOF by email to Greg Palmieri, or phone during regular business hours (8am-5pm) at 907.766.2120. If the Haines Office is unavailable, alternative assistance may be reached at the DOF Southeast Area Office: contact the Area Forester, Greg Staunton, at greg.staunton@alaska.gov, 907.225.3070. To be eligible to appeal the final decision, a person must have provided written comment to the DOF by **4:00pm August 30, 2022**.

VII. PUBLIC NOTICE

This PBIF was publicly noticed in compliance with AS 38.05.945. Notice was posted on the Alaska Online Public Notice System, the local Haines newspaper, delivered to Agencies and other Government organizations through email, and posted publicly in the community of Haines.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION AND PRELIMINARY DECISION

After due consideration of all pertinent information and alternatives, the DNR has reached the following Preliminary Decision: To offer for sale approximately 1,500 acres of Sitka Spruce and Western Hemlock timber to provide sawtimber, house logs, and firewood, reduce fire hazard, and improve wildlife habitat as proposed 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).

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

If you have any questions, please contact Greg Staunton, Southeast Area Forester, greg.staunton@alaska.gov, 907.225.3070.

IX. SIGNATURE

Greg Staunton Digitally signed by Greg Staunton
Date: 2022.07.25 17:34:30 -08'00'

Greg Staunton
Southeast Area Forester
Alaska Division of Forestry

Date

X. ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A NSE-1597 Ski Hill Timber Sale Area Maps (2 pages)

Appendix B References

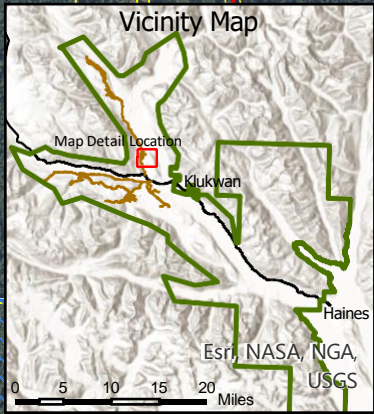
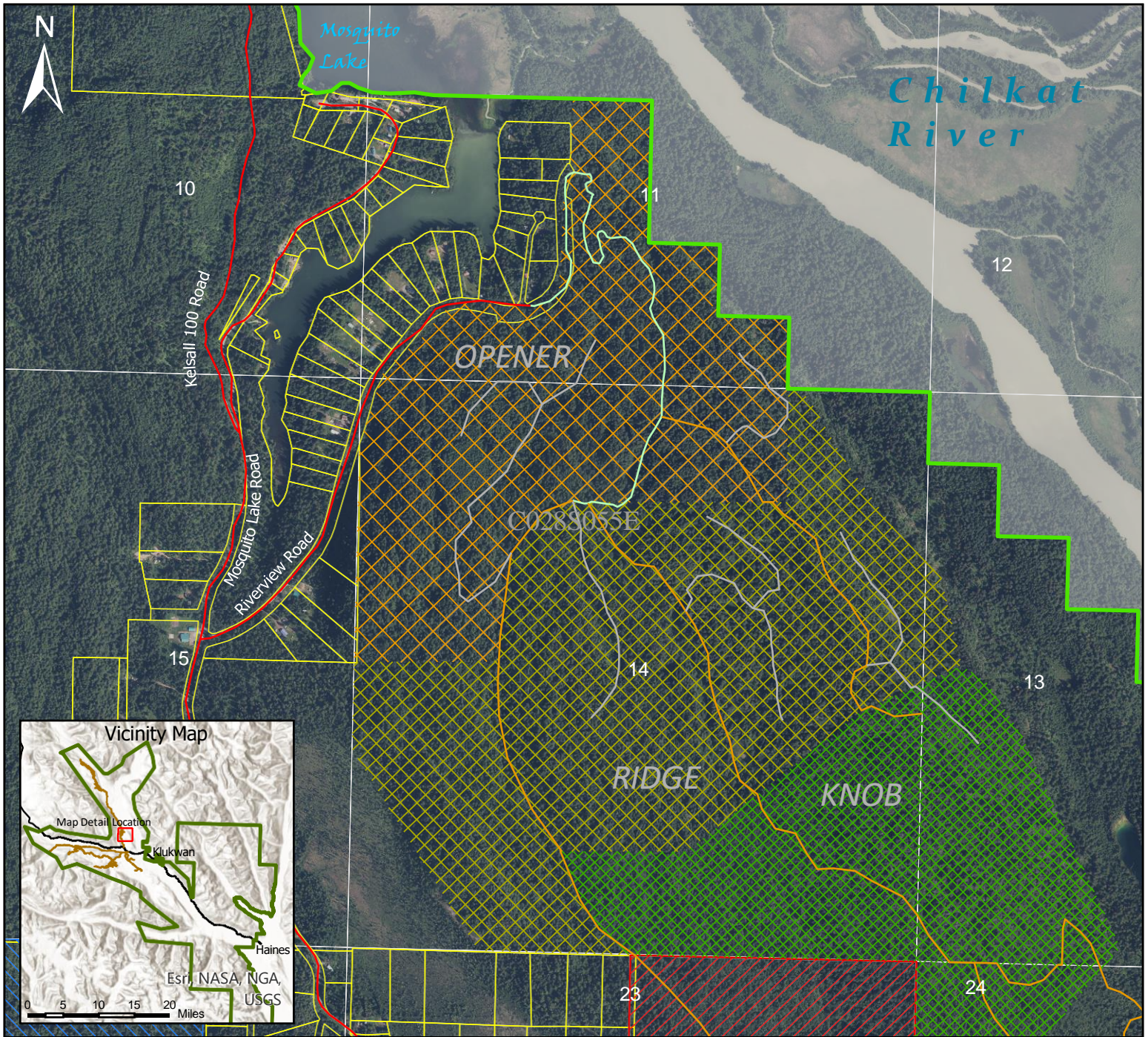
Appendix C Reserved for Appeal Regulations

Appendix D Reserved for Ski Hill Timber Sale Comments & Responses

Appendix A NSE-1597 Ski Hill Timber Sale Area Maps

Location and Access

- Map 1
- Map 2



0 660 1,320 1,980 2,640 Feet

Coordinate System: NAD83 2011
 State Plane AK Zone 1 FIPS 5001
 Map Scale: 1 inch = .25 miles

HAINES STATE FOREST

Ski Hill Timber Harvest PBIF

Location and Access Map 1

Appendix A

State of Alaska
 Division of Forestry
 Haines Office

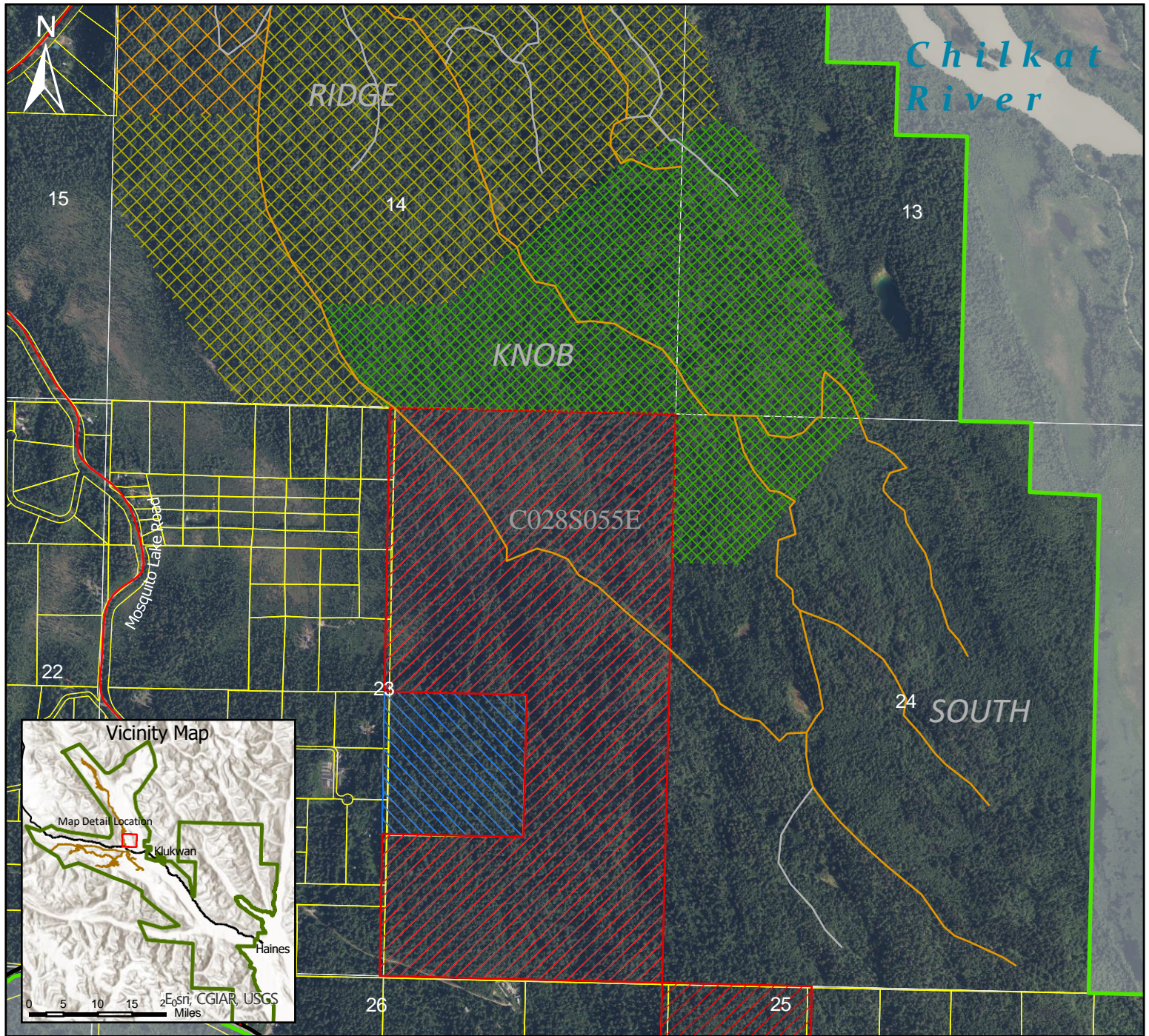
Prepared by: GJP - SOA/DNR, DOF 07/22

"Develop, conserve, enhance, and manage the state's forests to provide a sustainable yield of forest resources for Alaska"



Legend

- HSF Boundary
- CBEP Boundary
- University of Alaska Land
- Haines_Borough_Parcel_011118
- Proposed Harvest Areas
 - Ski Hill Opener 1597 - A
 - Ski Hill Ridge 1597 - B
 - Ski Hill Knob 1597 - C
 - Ski Hill South 1597 - D
- Existing Roads
- Road Development
 - Main Access
 - Main Line Rd
 - Secondary Rd



Legend

- HSF Boundary
- CBEP Boundary
- University of Alaska Land
- Mental Health Trust Land
- Haines_Borough_Parcels_011118
- Proposed Harvest Areas
- Ski Hill Opener 1597 - A
- Ski Hill Ridge 1597 - B
- Ski Hill Knob 1597 - C
- Ski Hill South 1597 - D
- Existing Roads
- Road Development
- Main Access
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Coordinate System: NAD83 2011
 State Plane AK Zone 1 FIPS 5001
 Map Scale: 1 inch = .25 miles

HAINES STATE FOREST
Ski Hill Timber Harvest PBIF
Location and Access Map 2
Appendix A

State of Alaska
 Division of Forestry
 Haines Office

Prepared by: GJP - SOA/DNR, DOF 07/22

"Develop, conserve, enhance, and manage the state's forests to provide a sustainable yield of forest resources for Alaska"



Appendix B References

Haines State Forest Management Plan (rev.2002)

Haines State Forest Five Year Forest Management Schedule (2020-2024, 2022-2026)

State Agency Comments regarding the two most recent HSF 5yr FMS

Haines Borough Comprehensive Management Plan (2012)

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Soil Survey

Alaska Department of Natural Resources – Land Use Records (water rights)