

PETERSBURG RANGER DISTRICT



TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

January 2009 Public Involvement Scoping Letter **Outfitter and Guide Environmental Assessment**

Greetings,

The Forest Service, Tongass National Forest, Petersburg Ranger District, is seeking your involvement regarding a revised proposal to the Petersburg Outfitter and Guide Environmental Assessment (EA) (formerly *Stikine Area Outfitter and Guide Environmental Analysis*, 1997), a programmatic document that provides a framework for managing outfitter and guide special use permits on the Petersburg Ranger District. If you recall, in June and July of this year, the Wrangell and Petersburg Ranger Districts sent out scoping letters related to managing the outfitter and guide use on these two districts. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about our revised proposed action based on concerns and feedback we received from the previous scoping letters and to request your comments on this revised proposal.

One of the decisions we have made since we sent the first scoping letters is to analyze the Wrangell and Petersburg Ranger Districts separately and publish two EAs, rather than one, as initially proposed. Public comments received during the first round of scoping demonstrated that there are different issues for each district that require a unique set of alternatives. Trying to develop distinct alternatives to address the issues for both districts would be confusing and difficult to implement.

A second change is how to allocate Recreation Visitor Days. Many of the responses from our initial proposed action raised concerns about the proposed Recreation Visitor Day (RVD) allocations in many of the study areas on the Petersburg Ranger District. Based on your comments, we are proposing to manage outfitter and guide use on the Petersburg Ranger District on a seasonal, rather than yearly, basis (see Tables 1A and 1B). There would be an emphasis on limiting commercial use during the spring and fall seasons to reduce user conflicts and provide more opportunities for solitude. Of the total RVDs proposed for each study area, we have divided them up into spring, summer, fall, and winter seasons with proposed allocations of 10 percent, 65 percent, 15 percent, and 10 percent, respectively.

Another change the District made is to revise the reported use days associated with guided black bear hunting operations. This activity spends a relatively small portion of time on National Forest System (NFS) lands, and can require a considerable amount of time spent in areas adjacent to the National Forest. This is especially true for activities that are boat based. An adjustment was made to the reported use, in consideration of the maintenance of the recreation experience that is associated with this kind of remote setting activity. This adjustment is reflected in the recreation visitor days that were averaged over the last three years.

Project Location

The project area consists of National Forest System (NFS) lands encompassing the entire Petersburg Ranger District of the Tongass National Forest. The District totals more than 1.2 million acres in central Southeast Alaska. Located within the Alexander Archipelago, the project area extends from Chatham Strait on the west, to Sumner Strait on the south, and from the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness to just north of Cape Fanshaw. For the purpose of this project, we've divided the District into study areas. The attached map displays the study area boundaries.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this initiative is to:

- respond to special use permit applications;
- authorize commercial use in the Petersburg Creek-Duncan Salt Chuck, Kuiu, and Tebenkof Bay Wilderness Areas while protecting wilderness character;
- manage outfitter and guide recreation use on the Petersburg District to minimize potential impacts to all resources; and
- provide the opportunity for use of the National Forest that benefits the general public.

This action is needed to analyze the potential impacts from outfitter/guide use on National Forest System (NFS) lands and to set reasonable levels of use based on social and environmental conditions. It responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Tongass Forest Plan (2008), and helps move the Petersburg Ranger District towards the desired conditions described in the Forest Plan (p. 2-1). The Forest Plan provides standards and guidelines to authorize services of qualified outfitters and guides to the public, where the need has been identified and is compatible with the objectives and management direction of the affected Land Use Designation (LUD), and to issue priority use permits, whenever possible, supplemented with temporary permits (p. 4-46).

Forest Service policy (FSM 2720 and FSH 2709.11) allows for the issuance of special use authorizations for up to 10 years. Applications for multi-year permits allow outfitters and guides to make financial commitments necessary to continue to provide services to the public.

Special Use Authorizations permitting individuals, companies, or organizations to provide visitor services in Wilderness may be issued if there is demonstrated need for the service(s) and they are deemed appropriate for the area proposed (Forest Plan, p. 3-20). In September 2007, the Forest Supervisor made a determination of need for the services of outfitters and guides within Wilderness Areas to meet recreational purposes on the Tongass. In that document, it specifies that District Rangers remain responsible for making the final decision regarding the type, extent, amount, and location of commercial use within wilderness. In addition, as Congress has identified each wilderness as being separate management units with their own unique characteristics, decisions will be made on a wilderness-by-wilderness basis.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need is to authorize outfitter and guide operations through the issuance of special use permits, based on the Petersburg Recreation Use Carrying Capacity Report. The District is proposing to allocate outfitter and guides up to 10 percent of the capacity within an identified home range and 25 percent outside an identified home range¹. These allocations would be proportioned out by season; 10% in the spring, 65% in the summer, 15% in the fall and 10% in the winter (Tables 1A and 2A). This emphasizes more limitation on commercial use in the spring and fall to reduce user conflicts and provide more opportunities for solitude.

The proposal would authorize up to approximately 41,101 RVDs across the District for use by outfitters and guides. The use authorized may be temporary in nature (less than one year) or could be for multiple years. For those operators who have demonstrated satisfactory performance, the District Ranger may issue priority use permits, for a period of up to 10 years, in accordance with FSH 2709.11.

Forest Plan Management Direction

The 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan will be the primary source of management direction.

Project Schedule

The draft Environmental Assessment and project file should be completed by the end of this winter. A decision, after internal review, the public notice and comment period is estimated to be released in May 2009.

Public Participation

The Petersburg and Wrangell Outfitter and Guide EA was listed in the April 2008, Schedule of Proposed Activities (SOPA). An Open House was held at the Petersburg Ranger District on May 5, 2008, where a map of the Petersburg study areas was on display. On July 8, 2008, an Open House was held in Kake. A map of the Petersburg study areas was on display and both districts' scoping letters were available. The July 2008, October 2008 and January 2009 SOPA listed the Petersburg Outfitter and Guide EA and the Wrangell Outfitter and Guide EA separately. This letter is an additional invitation for formal public participation.

Your input and ideas are important in completing the Petersburg Outfitter and Guide EA. Please fill out the attached comment sheet and return it to us. We want to hear all of your ideas. Comments are most helpful when they refer to specific areas or resources within the project area. You can also call us at (406) 827-0717 and talk to Kathy Rodriguez, Recreation Planner. Comments may also be faxed (907-772-5995) or e-mailed to comments-alaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us with "Outfitter and Guide EA" in the subject line. The interdisciplinary team will be developing issues and alternatives in February. It would be most helpful to have comments by February 20th for this process. However, comments will be accepted any time.

Comments received, including names and addresses, are considered part of the public record for this proposed action and available to the public. Pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the

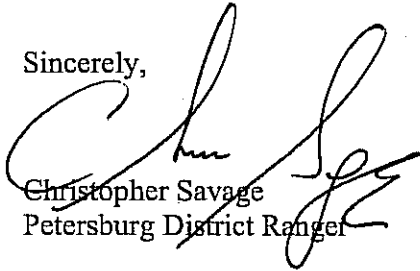
¹ The allocation of 10% and 25% is by recreation place, not by study area.

Petersburg Outfitter and Guide EA

agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

We look forward to your participation. Your input and ideas will help ensure a successful assessment. Thank you for taking the time to help manage your National Forest!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Savage', written over the printed name and title.

Christopher Savage
Petersburg District Ranger

Petersburg Ranger District Study Areas

— P24 | Study Area Boundary
Water

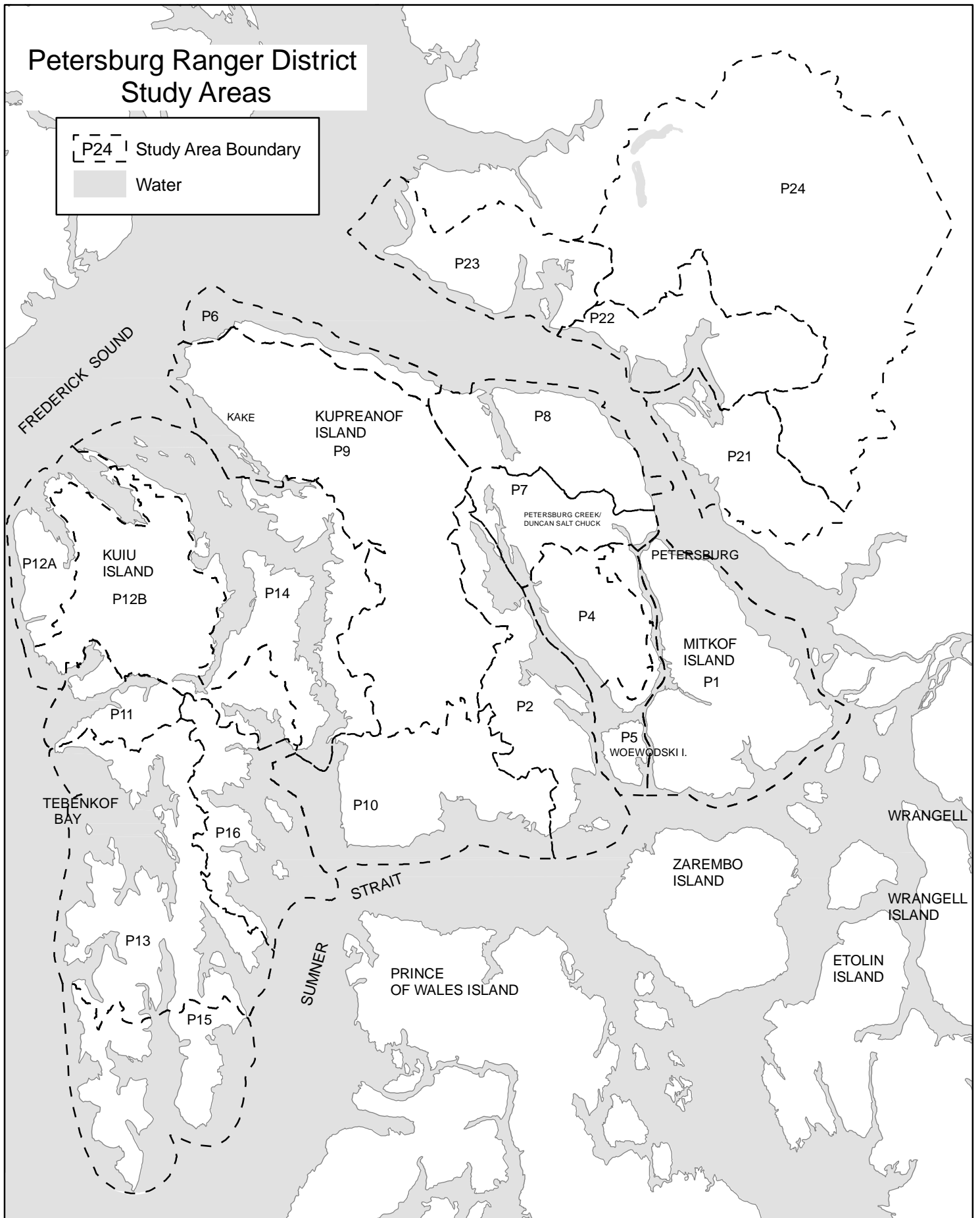


Table 1A. Study area comparison of average actual use (2005-2007), by RVD, for outfitters and guides on the Petersburg Ranger District for all seasons.

STUDY AREA	Average Recreation Visitor Days Used				
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Total Annual
	(April 1- May 31)	(June 1- August 31)	(Sept 1- Oct. 31)	(Nov 1- March 31)	
1 Mitkof Island	20	439	17	0	476
2 Duncan Canal – West Side	4	72	1	0	77
4 Duncan Canal – East Side	0	0	0	0	0
5 Wrangell Narrows/Woewodski Island	0	26	7	0	33
6 Kupreanof Island – North Shore	4	380	13	0	397
7 Petersburg Creek/Duncan Salt Chuck	37	176	10	0	223
8 North Lindenberg Peninsula	14	184	22	13	233
9 Central Kupreanof Island/Road System	0	14	0	0	14
10 Southwest Kupreanof Island	16	431	1	0	448
11 Rowan Bay/Bay of Pillars	33	103	8	1	145
12A Saginaw/Security/Washington Bays	111	340	117	2	570
12B Kuiu Island Road System	13	74	66	0	153
13 Tebenkof Bay/Kuiu Wilderness	61	392	9	4	466
14 Keku Strait/Port Camden	46	311	37	4	398
15 South Kuiu Island	5	249	0	2	256
16 Reid/No Name Bays	2	129	1	0	132
21 Muddy River Area	0	181	75	33	289
22 Thomas Bay/Point Vandeput	14	259	7	13	293
23 Farragut Bay/Cape Fanshaw	1	42	0	0	43
24 Baird/Patterson Glaciers	1	9	4	0	14

Table 1B. Study area comparison of proposed RVD allocation for outfitters and guides on the Petersburg Ranger District for all seasons.

STUDY AREA	Recreation Visitor Days Proposed				
	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Total Annual ¹
	10%	65%	15%	10%	100%
1 Mitkof Island	1430	9293	2,145	1,430	14,297
2 Duncan Canal – West Side	112	729	168	112	1,122
4 Duncan Canal – East Side	50	324	75	50	499
5 Wrangell Narrows/Woewodski Island	175	1136	262	175	1,747
6 Kupreanof Island – North Shore	45	291	67	45	448
7 Petersburg Creek/Duncan Salt Chuck	96	627	145	96	964
8 North Lindenberg Peninsula	137	892	206	137	1,373
9 Central Kupreanof Island/Road System	386	2510	579	386	3,862
10 Southwest Kupreanof Island	147	955	220	147	1,469
11 Rowan Bay/Bay of Pillars	96	627	145	96	964
12A Saginaw/Security/Washington Bays	129	839	194	129	1,291
12B Kuiu Island Road System	207	1346	311	207	2,071
13 Tebenkof Bay/Kuiu Wilderness	289	1880	434	289	2,893
14 Keku Strait/Port Camden	156	1015	234	156	1,562
15 South Kuiu Island	126	816	188	126	1,255
16 Reid/No Name Bays	112	728	168	112	1,120
21 Muddy River Area	130	842	194	130	1,296
22 Thomas Bay/Point Vandeput	126	820	189	126	1,261
23 Farragut Bay/Cape Fanshaw	120	780	180	120	1,200
24 Baird/Patterson Glaciers	41	265	61	41	407

¹Differences in totals are due to rounding.

NOTE: Forest Service public mailing lists may be made available to those who request them under the Freedom of Information Act. Your name and address cannot remain confidential if you are on the mailing list.

<input type="checkbox"/> YES	I want to stay on the Petersburg Outfitter and Guide EA mailing list. Please send all future project information to my current address, printed below.
<input type="checkbox"/> NO	I do not wish to remain on the Petersburg Outfitter and Guide EA mailing list. Please do not send any further information regarding this project.

If you do not check a box or do not return this form, then we will assume that you do not wish to remain on the mailing list.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Fold, staple, stamp and mail-----

From:

(return address requested)

TO:

Petersburg Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
Attn: Marina Whitacre
Outfitter and Guide EA
PO Box 1328
Petersburg, AK 99833



Petersburg Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
Comments requested by
February 20, 2009

Petersburg Ranger District
Tongass National Forest
PO Box 1328
Petersburg, Alaska 99833