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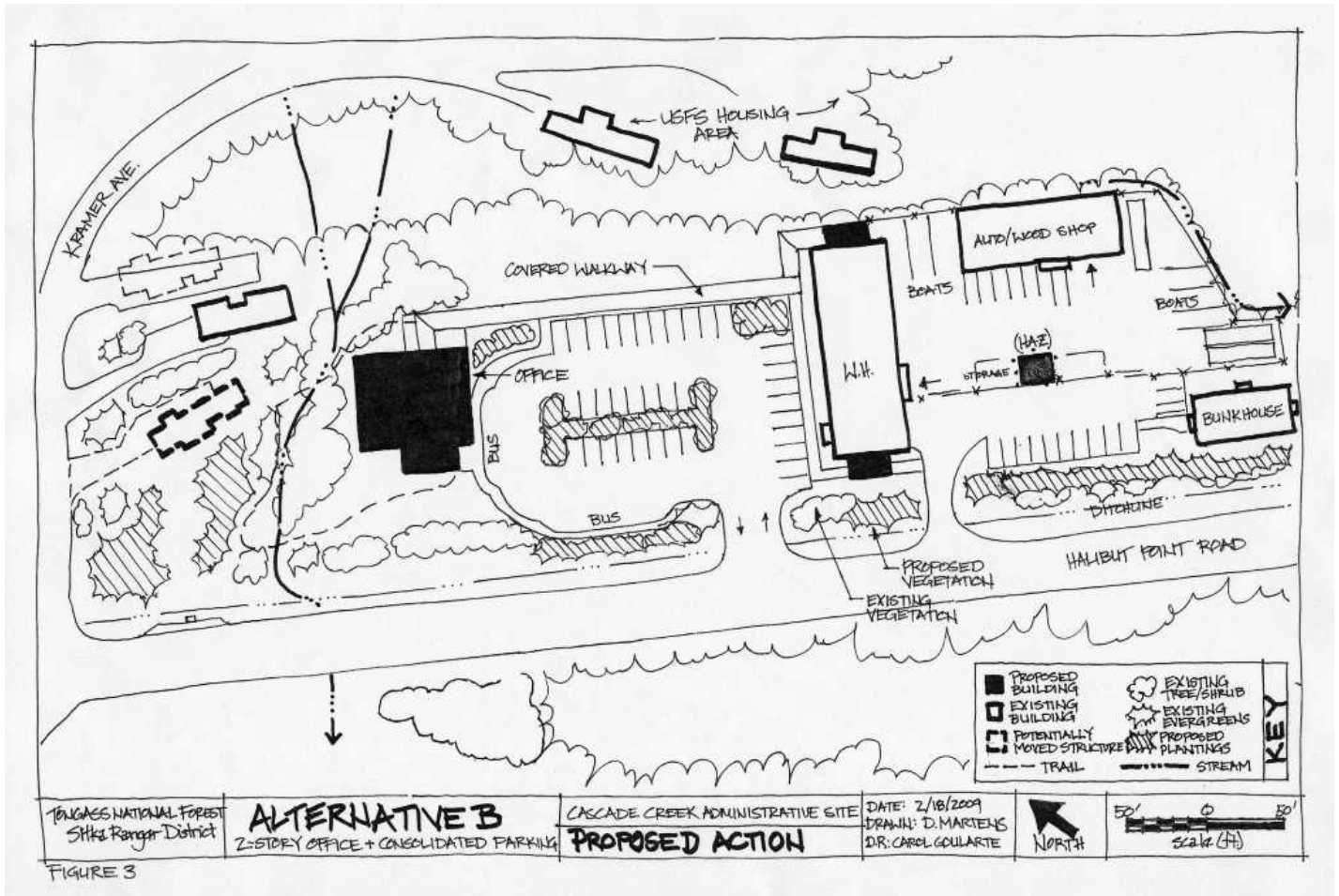
Tongass National
Forest

March 2009

Sitka Ranger District New Office

Environmental Assessment

Sitka Ranger District
Sitka, Alaska



Sitka Ranger District New Office EA

Key Acronyms

CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
DN	Decision Notice
EA	Environmental Assessment
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
GSA	General Service Administration
IDT	Interdisciplinary Team
MIS	Management Indicator Species
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969



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CHAPTER 1, PURPOSE AND NEED

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts: *Introduction* - includes the purpose of and need for the project, and information on public involvement; *Alternatives* - includes a description of the alternatives and a summary of the environmental consequences associated with the alternatives; *Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences* - describes existing conditions and the environmental effects of implementing the alternatives; and *Consultation and Coordination* - provides a list of document preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the EA as well as a list of references used to prepare this EA.

Additional documentation, including resource specific detailed descriptions of the project area and analyses of the project effects, may be found in the project planning record located at the Sitka Ranger District Office in Sitka, Alaska.

Summary of the Proposed Action

The Sitka District Ranger's Proposed Action for the Sitka Ranger District New Office (Sitka Office) project is to construct a new Forest Service office and associated access and parking area, and remove a three-bedroom residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building (to be sold or demolished) at the Cascade Creek Administrative Site on Halibut Point Road between Cascade Creek and Kramer Avenue in Sitka, Alaska. Figures 1 and 2 at the end of the EA show the vicinity of the project and the approximate locations of improvements. The Proposed Action is Alternative B. See Chapter 2 for a complete description of the Proposed Action.

Background

The current Forest Service office in Sitka, Alaska, is located in the privately owned K&R Building at 204 Siginaka Way. This three-story, 22,500 square foot building was built for Forest Service occupancy in 1983 in response to a 10-year lease agreement with the General Service Administration (GSA). In 1994, the Forest Service and GSA renegotiated the lease agreement for an additional 10 years, and a 2004 occupancy agreement extended the terms of the lease to November 2009. The current GSA lease rate is \$554,802 per year for the office building plus \$4,666 per year for 12 government vehicle parking spaces.

The Forest Service advised GSA that, as of November 2008, the Assigned Usable Office Space needed by the Forest Service in the K&R Building would be reduced by 5,260 square feet. To achieve this reduction, the Forest Service personnel moved into the second and third

floor, with only the reception area and two computer rooms remaining on the first floor. The current GSA lease rate should be reduced by about \$100,000 per year when the new occupancy agreement becomes effective.

Space is available at the Forest Service Cascade Creek Administrative Site to build a new office. The project area/Cascade Creek Administrative Site is located on Halibut Point Road, north of Cascade Creek and south of Kramer Avenue in Sitka, Alaska (see Figure 1 at the end of this EA). Public Land Orders withdrew the land and reserved it for the use of the Forest Service. A warehouse, wood/auto shop, bunkhouse, residence, tree cooler, soils lab, pole building used for storage, fuel/oil/hazardous material (hazmat) storage shed, two mobile homes, one vacant mobile home pad, three storage containers, lawn, and gravel storage, parking, and driveway currently occupy the project area. A new Forest Service owned office would cost less than \$200,000 annually to operate and maintain — a savings of about \$360,000 each year compared to the annual rent currently being paid for the GSA leased Forest Service office.

The project area is within the City and Borough of Sitka (City) on Baranof Island, Alaska (see Figure 1). The lots are zoned Public Lands District and the proposal is in compliance with current City planning and zoning regulations. The residence, tree cooler, soils lab, and pole building would be sold and removed or demolished prior to construction of a new facility.

Purpose of and Need for Action _____

The 2008 Tongass NF Facility Master Plan (USDA Forest Service 2008a) indicates that a new office facility should be acquired on the Sitka Ranger District because the current office lease expires in 2009. As described in the Preliminary Project Analysis for the Administrative Office – Sitka (USDA Forest Service 2009a), there is a need for:

- Up to 10,000 square feet of office space for 48 people
- Parking spaces for 34 vehicles to accommodate visitors and employees, plus parking spaces for two buses and seven government vehicles
- Reduced rent and utility charges (lower facility costs increase the amount of money the Forest Service can spend to support natural resource management activities)
- Consolidated facilities that reduce travel to the warehouse complex, carpentry shop, and the bunkhouse

The purpose of the Sitka Office project is to develop an accessible office and related access and parking.

Management Direction _____

The 2008 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, USDA Forest Service 2008b) guides the management of the project area. The project area is located on Halibut Point Road, north of Cascade Creek and south of Kramer Avenue in Sitka, Alaska. The project area lies within part of T 55 S., R 63 E., Section 27, Copper River Meridian (Lots 10 and 1, at 2104 through 2116 Halibut Point Road). The Forest Plan states

that administrative facilities are needed to support the management, protection, and utilization of the National Forests including buildings, utility systems, dams, and other constructed features. While the Forest Plan does not provide land use designations for the project area or administrative site, it does require buildings be designed to be safe, functional, aesthetically pleasing, energy efficient and cost effective. The Forest Plan provides direction that buildings must be maintained to meet codes applicable at the time of construction.

To meet management direction, we would design and build all improvements to code. The Sitka Ranger District would follow the development standards for the “Public Lands District” zone.

Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 7309.11 (Buildings and Related Facilities) authorizes the Forest Service to plan, design, and construct facilities as necessary to accomplish the agency's mission. The Handbook also requires Sustainable Building Guiding Principles be used for new construction of offices less than 10,000 square feet. The Guiding Principles are to employ integrated design principles, optimize energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, protect and conserve water, enhance indoor environmental quality, and reduce the environmental impacts of materials.

The Cascade Creek Administrative Site was established as an administrative site and a public service site in the 1950s and 1960s through two separate public land orders. The lots on which the site sits encompass 8.9 acres; only 4.0 acres are included in the project area.

Several documents influenced the scope of this Environmental Analysis including the Tongass National Forest Facilities Master Plan (USDA Forest Service November 2008a), the 2008 Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2008b), the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (FEIS and ROD) for the Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2008c), the Preliminary Project Analysis for the Administrative Office – Sitka (USDA Forest Service 2009a), and Forest Service Handbook direction.

Decision Framework

The Sitka District Ranger is the Responsible Official for this proposal. Based on the environmental analysis in this EA, the Sitka District Ranger will decide whether or not and how to construct a new office and associated activities. The District Ranger will also determine whether or not and what mitigation measures and monitoring will occur for the project.

The Responsible Official has authority to choose the no action alternative, either of the action alternatives, or portions of the action alternatives, and implement the project according to the decision. Such decisions and the rationale for the decision will be documented in the project Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (DN and FONSI).

Public Involvement

The Sitka Office project Environmental Assessment (EA) has been listed on the Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions since January 1, 2009.

To date, the public has been invited to participate in the following ways:

Public Mailing: On February 9, 2009 a letter providing information and seeking public comment was mailed to approximately 135 individuals and groups that had previously shown interest in Forest Service projects in and around Sitka. This included federal and state agencies, Alaska Native groups, municipal offices, businesses, interest groups, and individuals. An update to the original scoping was sent to these same people in late February, 2009 showing a modified project area. Based on preliminary analysis, the project area was expanded from that shown in the original scoping letter to allow enough space for parking and building and container relocation. Four responses to the Sitka Office EA mailing were received.

Legal Notice: The legal notice for the 30-day comment period will be published in the *Daily Sitka Sentinel* upon release of this EA.

Meetings with Agencies: The Sitka Ranger District contacted the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (January 29, 2009, USFWS Consultation Log Number 71440-2009-SL-0020), and National Marine Fisheries Service (February 25, 2009) and provided them with information and analysis results on the Sitka Office project. The project received verbal concurrence on determinations from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Sitka Ranger District contacted the City of Sitka's building official about permit requirements, zoning and the project in February 2009.

Meetings with Native Groups: The Sitka Ranger District sent a scoping letter to the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Shee Atika, Incorporated, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, and Sealaska Corporation in February 2009 identifying the purpose and need for the project and describing the proposal. On December 17, 2008 and February 18, 2009 the District Ranger discussed the Sitka Office EA project concept with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska at their monthly Council meetings. Consultation on conceptual alternatives will be offered during the public comment period. No concerns have been raised by Tribes or tribal corporations.

Issues

For the purposes of this analysis, issues identified during the public involvement process are categorized as either significant or non-significant. Significant issues are those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action and represent disputes, disagreements or debate about the effects of the proposed action. Non-significant issues are those: 1) outside the scope (not related to the effects) of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Four responses to the Sitka Office EA mailing were received. The District also had internal scoping discussions.

Significant Issue

The Forest Service identified one significant issue for the Sitka Office project:

Large parking lots are visually unappealing and affect the character of a building site.

Non-significant Issues

Several external and internal concerns and suggestions were considered as issues but were determined not to be alternative-driving issues. Where possible, suggestions about the project were incorporated into the design of the Proposed Action and other action alternatives. A list of non-significant issues and the reasons for categorizing the issues as non-significant is found below:

The public asked that the initial costs of the project as well as the long-term cost savings to be shown so that the public can understand why this project is being proposed. *This information is displayed in the EA*

The interdisciplinary team (IDT) considered the recommendation that the vehicle entrance for a new office come off of Kramer Avenue and that the Forest Service work with Alaska Department of Transportation to develop a left turn lane on south bound Halibut Pt. Road to access Kramer Avenue. *Alternative C includes egress and access along Kramer Avenue. The location of the vehicle entrance in Alternative C would eliminate at least one and possibly two trailer pads which lessens housing opportunities for Forest Service employees. The Forest Service would work with Alaska Department of Transportation during the design phase of the project to procure driveway permits and discuss future improvements along Halibut Point Road adjacent to the project area, including a turn lane.*

The IDT considered recommendations for the construction and design of the building including: building the office with local material as much as possible, using “green” products and designing for energy efficiency, building with multiple heat sources (including wood heating), and doing demolition and construction of the building with volunteers. *The procedure for demolition of existing buildings, and the design and construction of the new office building are outside the scope of this analysis. However during the design phase of the project, the Forest Service would use Sustainable Building Guiding Principles as per Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 7309.11 (Buildings and Related Facilities). The Guiding Principles are to employ integrated design principles, optimize energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, protect and conserve water, enhance indoor environmental quality, and reduce the environmental impacts of materials.*

The IDT considered recommendations to explore the opportunity at the Cascade Creek Administrative Site for interpretation/education and the construction and use of a wood boiler heating system for several Forest Service buildings. *These proposals and associated developments are not well developed at this time but will be explored more in depth during the design phase of this project.*

CHAPTER 2, ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Sitka Office project. It includes a description and map of each alternative considered. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the design of the alternative and some of the information is based upon the environmental, social, and economic effects of implementing each alternative.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis _____

Several alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. They are combined here into two alternatives:

Construct a one-story, not to exceed 10,000 ft² office with a single parking lot: This design was eliminated for many reasons: the footprint of the building was large enough that it would have required a stream to be moved; this construction technique is costly and prone to failure. Additionally, two-story structures are generally more energy efficient and use less material and leave more green space, better meeting the direction to construct an efficient, “green” building. Finally, this alternative would eliminate three trailer pads. Given the lack of affordable housing options in Sitka, the District Ranger wants to retain at least one trailer pad if possible.

Construct or rent an office in a different location, closer to downtown: These proposals were eliminated because they did not meet the purpose and need for the project due to their higher costs combined with the lack of consolidation of Forest Service buildings and activities. In addition, options for maintaining downtown visitor contact such as locating a Forest Service information receptionist with the National Park Service at Totem Park or at the Russian Bishops residence, or doing a “meet-and-greet” at the docks, remain available to the District.

Alternatives Considered in Detail _____

Alternative A (No Action)

In Alternative A, no demolition of the buildings, relocation of buildings, or construction of a new office, parking areas or access would occur (see Figure 2 at the end of this EA). The Sitka District would continue to rent the existing building or seek other rental office space.

If construction of facilities were desired in the future, new NEPA analysis would be initiated.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

The Proposed Action includes constructing a two-story office building, not exceeding 10,000 ft² and associated access and parking area, and removing the existing residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building. The hazmat storage shed and three storage containers would be relocated and one trailer home may be relocated to an existing pad (see Figure 3 at the end of this EA). One or two trailer pads may have to be eliminated, depending on the final design. Access to the warehouse/compound area would use the existing access from Halibut Point Road; access to the office site would use a new driveway about 40 feet north of the warehouse driveway.

The office would accommodate 48 employees and have a pleasing exterior image. The site would provide paved parking spaces for about 34 vehicles, including both visitors and employees, and two buses in one large parking lot on the southeast side of the office building, and gravel parking spaces for up to 20 vehicles, including seven government vehicles, in the area southeast of the office. A fence would be built around the warehouse parking and storage area to provide security. Some trees and shrubs in the project area would be removed, but trees and shrubs would also be planted to enhance the site. Associated walkways/trails would be installed and power lines would be buried. Outdoor lighting would be installed; lighting would be determined during the design phase and would meet Forest Service guidelines.

Excavation would be necessary to construct a foundation for the office building, for access and parking, and to remove the existing residence foundation. The existing residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building could be excised (sold) to the general public and/or demolished and disposed of, depending on available funding and timing associated with construction of the new structure. The demolition of the buildings would be accomplished with heavy equipment, such as an excavator, and dump truck/s for disposal of materials to an approved landfill. Demolition of any hazardous materials would follow federal and state regulations for removal and disposal.

Figure 3 shows approximate locations of structures, parking, utilities, access, and walkways. Subsequent analysis and IDT recommendations may slightly change the location and shape of developments.

Proposed activities, including design and construction, are expected to take from three to four years to complete, but may be split up into several phases over several years depending on funding, timing, and contracting. If funding is available, we would expect to start the design phase in 2010.

Alternative C

Alternative C includes constructing a two-story office building, not exceeding 10,000 ft² and associated access and parking area, and removing the existing residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building. The hazmat storage shed and three storage containers would be relocated and one trailer home would be relocated to an existing pad (see Figure 4 at the end of this EA). One trailer pad and possibly a second trailer pad will need to be eliminated during the design phase. Access to the warehouse area would use the existing access from Halibut Point Road; access to the office site would be both from Kramer Avenue and from a driveway 40 feet north of the warehouse driveway on Halibut Point Road. The stream would be placed in

a culvert under the Kramer Avenue access driveway; the culvert would be sized to meet watershed and fishery needs.

The office would accommodate 48 employees and have a pleasing exterior image. The site would provide paved parking spaces for about 34 vehicles, including both visitors and employees, and two buses in two parking lots, one on the northwest side and one on the southeast side of the office building. It would also provide gravel parking spaces for up to 20 vehicles, including seven government vehicles, in the area southeast of the warehouse. A fence would be built around the warehouse parking and storage area to provide security. Some trees and shrubs in the project area would be removed, but trees and shrubs would also be planted to enhance the site. Associated walkways/trails would be installed and power lines would be buried. Outdoor lighting would be installed; lighting would be determined during the design phase and would meet Forest Service guidelines.

Excavation would be necessary to construct a foundation for the office building, for access and parking, and to remove the existing residence foundation. The existing residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building could be excised (sold) to the general public and/or demolished and disposed of, depending on available funding and timing associated with construction of the new structure. The demolition of the buildings would be accomplished with heavy equipment, such as an excavator, and dump truck/s for disposal of materials to an approved landfill. Demolition of any hazardous materials would follow federal and state regulations for removal and disposal.

Figure 4 shows approximate locations of structures, parking, utilities, access, and walkways. Subsequent analysis and IDT recommendations may slightly change the location and shape of developments.

Proposed activities, including design and construction, are expected to take from three to four years to complete, but may be split up into several phases over several years depending on funding, timing, and contracting. If funding is available, we would expect to start the design phase in 2010.

Project Design

The proposed action is designed to minimize environmental effects and meet Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. Best Management Practices (BMPs are found in the Alaska Region Soil and Water Conservation Handbook, 2509.22) related to administrative sites and facilities construction and improvement will be adhered to. These Best Management Practices include 12.8: Oil Pollution Prevention and Servicing/Refueling Operations, 12.13: Administrative Site Planning and Management, 12.17: Revegetation of Disturbed Areas, 14.6: Timing Restrictions for Construction Activities, and 14.11: Timely Erosion Control For Incomplete Projects. Elements of project design are discussed here. These project design elements and mitigation measures apply to the action alternatives.

Energy Conservation

The Forest Service would use Sustainable Building Guiding Principles as per Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 7309.11 (Buildings and Related Facilities). The Guiding Principles are to

employ integrated design principles, optimize energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, protect and conserve water, enhance indoor environmental quality, and reduce the environmental impacts of materials.

Fisheries

The stream crossing structure in Alternative C would be an oversized culvert or squash pipe with natural stream bed materials placed inside. The structure would be set to stream grade and sized to accommodate 100 year flow events.

Heritage

A cultural resource report has been written (A Level III Heritage Resource Investigation for the Sitka Ranger District Office and Administrative Complex). This report includes an evaluation of a historic building and results of survey and sub-surface testing for this project. It is the Forest Services intent to submit this cultural resources report to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to comply with 36CFR800. The Forest Service will take into consideration comments and mitigations proposed by SHPO regarding this project. A decision on this project is not expected until an effort has been made to consult to an end where a consensus agreement has been made with SHPO regarding this project.

Scenery

The buildings should be complimentary in color, texture and architectural elements.

Line & Form: Architectural elements from the new office can be applied to portions of the warehouse, such as a stairway enclosure, to create visually appealing structures on the project site.

Color: Natural wood tones to dark earthy tones best blend into the background, especially from distant views such as Sitka Sound. A color scheme standard will be developed for the entire project area.

Texture: Architectural elements may include log accents, window styles and other architectural treatments. These architectural elements can extend to site amenities such as fencing.

Landscaping: Attractive and sustainable landscaping material would be incorporated as part of this project. A compound landscape and maintenance plan would be developed as part of the long term facility plan.

Plants

The District Invasive Species Coordinator would review and approve a weed free soil source for all landscaping. Erosion control seed mixes and landscape plants would also be reviewed before use.

Any imported landscape plants would be monitored for weed species that may have come with their soil.

Prior to construction a control plan would be implemented for oxeye daisy and purple foxglove.

Project Monitoring

- An archaeological monitor will be present during initial ground preparation for the proposed Sitka Office project; there remains a possibility that buried Historic Properties may exist in the area of potential effects for heritage (see the Heritage section below). If Historic Properties are identified, excavation will cease and the District Ranger, SHPO's office and Tribes will be notified. At that time the Forest Service will re-enter into consultation to develop mitigations acceptable to the consulting parties and determine in what manner to proceed.
- Monitoring to assure that scenery design measures are carried through will be done during the design and construction phase to assure the new structure is within visual standards as described in the scenery section. The scenery resource specialist will conduct this monitoring.
- A long term monitoring and control plan for invasive plants will be implemented for the office grounds.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in Table 2-1 displays different levels of outputs and effects of the alternatives.

Table 2-1. Comparison of Alternatives

Effect, Activity, or Output	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B Proposed Action	Alternative C
Office	Existing leased office condition	Approximately 10,000sf, 2-story	Approximately 10,000sf, 2-story
Acres of gravel parking, storage, and driveway	3 acres	0.6 acres	0.6 acres
Acres of paved parking and driveway	0 acres (no paved parking currently)	0.6 acres	0.7 acres
Mobile Home relocation	No Effect	Potential to relocate one mobile home	Relocate one mobile home
Effects on perennial streams	No Effect	No Effect	50ft. of northernmost stream placed in a culvert
Acres of tree and shrub removal	0	1	1
Acres of tree and shrub planting	0	1.5	1.5
Acres of storage	1.1	0.8	0.8
Overhead power (OHP) lines along Halibut Point Road right-of-way	No change – OHP remain above ground	Burial of approximately 750ft of OHP	Burial of approximately 750ft of OHP
Total footprint of all developments ¹	3.5 acres	1.4 acres	1.8 acres
Linear feet of security fencing	350	460	460
Annual Costs ²	\$421,666	\$146,636	\$146,636
Development Costs ³	\$30,000	\$4,470,671	\$4,470,671
Present Value ³	\$5,269,093	\$5,099,864	\$5,099,864

¹ Developments include areas covered by buildings, gravel or pavement

² Annual Costs include utility costs, fuel costs, and operational costs such as janitorial, lease costs, and maintenance costs.

³ Development Costs include demolition costs, building and parking construction costs, voice/data costs, and moving costs.

⁴ Present Value is based on a 20-year analysis period and 4.9% nominal interest rate as per OMB Circular A-94, Appendix C, Revised

CHAPTER 3, AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the affected environment of the project area and the potential changes to the environment due to implementation of the alternatives. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects are disclosed. Effects are quantified where possible, but qualitative discussions are also included.

The following discussion of resources and potential effects associated with each of the alternatives takes advantage of existing information included in the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement; project-specific resource reports and related information; and other sources as indicated. Where applicable, such information is briefly summarized and referenced to minimize duplication.

This EA hereby incorporates, by reference, the project planning record and resource reports contained in the planning record (40 CFR 1502.21). The planning record for this project includes all project-specific information, including resource reports and other results of field investigations used to support the analysis and conclusions in this EA. Resource reports contain the detailed documentation the resource specialists relied upon to reach the conclusions in this EA. The planning record also contains information resulting from public involvement efforts. The planning record is located at the Sitka Ranger District office in Sitka, Alaska, and is available for review during regular business hours. Information from the record is available upon request.

Analyzing Effects

Environmental consequences are the effects of implementing an alternative on the physical, biological, social, and economic environment. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) include a number of specific categories to use for the analysis of environmental consequences. Several of these categories are applicable to the analysis of the proposed project and alternatives. They form the basis of much of the analysis that follows and are explained briefly below.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects

Direct environmental effects occur at the same time and place as the initial cause or action. Indirect effects occur later in time or are spatially removed from the action. Cumulative effects result from the incremental effects of actions when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time.

The following activities are expected to occur in and around the project area in the reasonably foreseeable future:

Through the City's design work for the Whitcomb Heights subdivision (Benchlands) it has been determined that construction of road cross-sections for Kramer Avenue would need cut and fill points that land outside the boundaries of the current easement. Reasonably foreseeable actions include an adjustment to the easement the City of Sitka holds along Kramer Avenue. In the next five to 20 years the City may pave the road and install sidewalks. The Whitcomb Heights subdivision is located upland from the project area.

The soils lab, pole building, and tree cooler will be decommissioned as funds become available as part of the Tongass National Forest facilities maintenance program strategy to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog and eliminate annual maintenance costs.

The facilities maintenance program will retrofit 4,100 ft² of the second floor of the warehouse into office space for up to 24 Forest Service employees.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects

The interdisciplinary process used to identify specific management activities was designed to eliminate or minimize adverse consequences. The application of Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, Best Management Practices (BMPs), project-specific design and mitigation measures, and monitoring are all intended to further limit the extent, severity, and duration of potential effects. Such measures are discussed throughout this chapter. Regardless of the use of these measures, some adverse effects would occur. The purpose of this chapter is to fully disclose these effects.

Short-term Use and Long-term Productivity

Because the area being affected is an existing administrative site, it has never supported the long-term productivity of trees. Office, parking and access construction would affect trees and tree growth in areas cleared for these purposes. Long-term productivity of other resources, particularly water and fisheries, is maintained through the application of resource protection measures described in Chapter 2.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments

Irreversible commitments imply a loss of future options. Generally the use of rock for construction is an irreversible commitment of that resource, and, though the area is not designated for timber harvest, the loss of tree productivity in areas cleared for new building, parking, and storage may be considered an irretrievable commitment of resources.

Analysis of the Alternatives by Resource

Because the effect on scenery was identified as a significant issue for this project, the analysis of effects has been organized with scenery first, followed by engineering/facilities, then by resource area. Concerns, suggestions, and design recommendations are discussed as they relate to the project's affected environment and potential effects of the alternatives on resources.

Scenery Management

Affected Environment

The area of visual quality analysis is the project area site of approximately four acres, as shown in Figure 1. The project area is characterized by gently sloping terrain (less than 15% grade) with groupings of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs and lawn. Two perennial streams flow through the project area. The project area backs up to a steeper hillside that is almost completely covered by spruce, hemlock, and red alder trees. The trees and the Forest Service trailer court behind them are both outside of the project area.

Current structures within the project area include a soils lab building, two mobile homes, one vacant trailer pad, a single family residence, a tree cooler building, a hazardous materials shed, three shipping containers used for storage (and one container that will be returned to the shipping company after a furniture auction), a pole building, a two-story warehouse, a shop building and a bunkhouse. Associated infrastructure (powerlines, parking areas, driveways, etc.) are also present. The condition of the existing structures ranges from good (warehouse, shop, bunkhouse) to fair/poor (residence) to poor (lab, pole building). Forest Service equipment, materials and supplies are stored on both sides of the warehouse with the primary fenced storage area located on the north side of the warehouse. About three acres of the project area is gravel parking lots, storage areas, and driveways

Overflow shop and warehouse-related activities include routine maintenance of vehicles, boats, motors and other equipment plus storage of materials, supplies, and equipment. These uses often occur outside of the warehouse or shop buildings, and as a result the aesthetic quality of the site can suffer. When materials and equipment pile up, views toward and within the compound can be unsightly.

The general color scheme associated with the existing buildings is light brown stained siding with yellow accents. The residence is yellow stained siding. All structures are constructed with T-111 composite siding except for the existing warehouse building which has horizontal lap siding.

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A (No Action)

Under the No Action Alternative, the existing condition would be maintained. The potential for unsightly views of unconsolidated materials and equipment would remain.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

The proposed two-story office building will be a dominant feature in the built landscape, but would help diminish the massive 'stand alone' scale of the existing warehouse. The office would fit into the surrounding area (the mixed zoning corridor along Halibut Point Road).

By meeting or exceeding established form, line, color and texture Forest Plan standards, the proposed office would not pose a negative visual impact. Upon project completion, the buildings would be architecturally different yet complimentary in color, texture and architectural elements.

The massing of a new office would be compatible with existing structures and may reduce the dominant nature of the warehouse, as seen from the project area and adjacent private and public property. Architectural elements from the new office building can be applied to the warehouse, such as a stairway enclosure, log accents, window styles and other architectural treatments which would help to further diminish the massive 'stand alone' scale of the existing warehouse. Additionally, consistent use of colors would also help maintain a sense of place of the entire compound.

The design character of the project area would extend to site amenities to create an attractive and appropriate office, warehouse and operations compound. A covered walkway between the office and warehouse would architecturally tie the buildings together and serve the functional purpose of protected cover for visitors and employees. The cover would not be visually intrusive. A low rail fence constructed around the perimeter of the project area would relate to building architecture and provide a sense of property containment, yet not be an imposing barrier to neighboring uses. Internal to the project area, the operations yard fencing would not be visually intrusive and serves an important function of security. This fenced area would largely be out of public view, since the warehouse yard is set back from the road.

Proposed tree and shrub plantings would accent and screen structures and road noise. The plantings would also blend and partially screen the project and compound facilities from residents and passing motorists. Alternative B would require the removal of approximately one acre of trees and shrubs for office and parking construction, but the alternative proposes to plant 1.5 acres of trees and shrubs for site enhancement and visual screening.

The parking lot would be shielded from road corridor views by the structures located on both sides, and proposed plantings would further reduce unsightly parking lot views.

Alternative B has a slightly larger single office parking lot than Alternative C, but does not have the second access road; it utilizes a single point of access from Halibut Point Road. Alternative B has less total paved surface area, approximately 0.6 acre, than Alternative C with approximately 0.7 acre.

The operations area in Alternatives B and C occupies approximately 0.8 acre of land; a reduction from the 1.1 acres currently occupied.

Under this Alternative, visual quality as well as compound functionality would improve and would appropriately fit into the mixed-use city zoning of various structures in the Halibut Point Road corridor.

Alternative C

Effects would mainly be similar to Alternative B with the exception of the perceived effects of the parking areas and the covered walkway. Alternative C was analyzed out of internal concern for the visual impact of a single large parking lot. By splitting the parking areas, the perceived size of the parking is distributed across the project area, producing a perceived

reduction in parking lot mass. Alternative C utilizes two entry points, requiring additional access through the site for vehicle circulation. Alternative C has approximately 0.7 acre of paved surface, compared to Alternative B's approximately 0.6 acre of parking and driveway.

The operations area, in both Alternatives B and C, occupies approximately 0.8 acre of land - a reduction from the 1.1 acres of currently occupied.

Under this Alternative, visual quality as well as compound functionality would improve and would appropriately fit into the mixed-use city zoning of various structures in the Halibut Point Road corridor.

Cumulative Effects

No cumulative impacts to visual quality are expected to occur because there are no past, ongoing, or reasonably foreseeable activities that, in addition to this project, would further affect visual quality in the project area.

Engineering/Facilities

Affected Environment

The current Forest Service office in Sitka, Alaska, is located in the privately owned K&R Building at 204 Siginaka Way. This three-story, 22,500 square foot building was built for Forest Service occupancy in 1983 in response to a 10-year lease agreement with the General Service Administration (GSA). In 1994, the Forest Service and GSA renegotiated the lease agreement for an additional 10 years, and a 2004 occupancy agreement extended the terms of the lease to November 2009. The current GSA lease rate is \$554,802 per year for the office building plus \$4,666 per year for 12 government vehicle parking spaces.

The Forest Service advised GSA that, as of November 2008, the Assigned Usable Office Space needed by the Forest Service in the K&R Building would be reduced by 5,260 square feet. To achieve this reduction, Forest Service personnel moved into the second and third floor, with only the reception area and two computer rooms remaining on the first floor. The current GSA lease rate should be reduced by about \$100,000 per year when the new occupancy agreement becomes effective.

Space is available at the Forest Service Cascade Creek Administrative Site to build a new office (see Figure 1). Public Land Orders withdrew the land and reserved it for the use of the Forest Service.

The project area occupies about four acres of the Cascade Creek Administrative Site, from Cascade Creek northwest to Kramer Avenue and bordered by Halibut Point Road on the southwest and the Forest Service Mobile Home Park on the northeast. There are eight buildings currently in the project area plus three mobile home pads and three storage containers. The buildings were built between 1959 (the residence) and 1983 (the tree cooler); their gross square footage is 18,370 square feet.

There are also gravel access roads and parking areas for the warehouse/shop/bunkhouse area, residence, and mobile home pads and a security fence around the warehouse storage area. There is a 0.4 acre gravel parking area between the warehouse, shop and bunkhouse, a 0.4 acre gravel storage yard between the warehouse and the residence, a 0.1 acre access road and parking for the residence, and a 0.1 acre gravel storage pad adjacent to the tree cooler. The storage yard is currently fenced with vehicle gates near the warehouse and the residence.

The 2008 Tongass National Forest Facility Master Plan indicates that the soils lab, pole building, and tree cooler would be decommissioned as funds become available in an effort to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog and eliminate annual maintenance costs (Table 3-1). The residence would be decommissioned only if the office project is implemented.

Table 3-1. Cost of Maintenance

Building Name	Annual Maintenance	Deferred Maintenance
Soils Lab	\$4,771	\$2,094
Pole Building	\$3,536	\$135
Tree Cooler	\$1,634	\$406
Residence	\$12,422	\$6,212
Total:	\$22,363	\$8,847

Hazardous materials surveys have been completed for the four buildings to be decommissioned. The residence has lead based paint on the white eaves and linoleum with asbestos containing material in the bathroom and kitchen. The asbestos containing material mudded pipe joints in the crawl space and pipe insulation in the attic were abated and removed in 1994. The other buildings contain no known hazardous materials.

Environmental and Social Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects

Table 3-2. Short-term and long-term costs

	Annual Costs ¹	Development Costs ²	Present Value ³
Alternative A (No Action) Consolidated office lease	\$421,666	\$30,000	\$5,269,093
Alternative A (No Action) Current office lease	\$559,468	\$0	\$6,973,967
Alternatives B and C New USFS owned office	\$146,636	\$4,470,671	\$5,099,864

¹ Annual Costs include utility, fuel, and operational costs such as janitorial, lease costs, and maintenance costs.

² Development Costs include demolition, building and parking construction, voice/data, and moving costs.

³ Present Value is based on a 20-year analysis period and 4.9% nominal interest rate as per OMB Circular A-94, Appendix C, Revised 2008

Alternative A (No Action)

Under No Action (Alternative A) the residence, bunkhouse, shop, hazmat storage shed, soils lab, tree cooler, pole building, warehouse, three storage containers, and three mobile home pads would continue to be used and maintained. Under Alternative A, the Forest Service would continue its lease agreement with the GSA. The GSA lease rate for 16,674 square feet would be about \$417,000 per year plus \$4,666 per year for 12 government vehicle parking spaces (Table 3-2).

Currently most of the vehicle traffic at Cascade Creek Administrative Site is during the workday by District personnel using the warehouse and shop. This traffic would continue.

Alternative B (Proposed Action)

Under the Proposed Action (Alternative B), activities as described in the Proposed Action (Chapter 2) would occur. The existing fence and the existing residence, soils lab, tree cooler and pole building structures would be removed. The hazmat storage shed and three storage containers would be relocated to the area southeast of the warehouse. Approximately 1.4 acres of ground would be disturbed at the Cascade Creek Administrative Site to complete all activities. A two-story office building, not exceeding 10,000 ft², would be constructed just to the north of the current residence site. A 300 lineal foot covered walkway would connect the office and the warehouse. The site's northern driveway/access road on Halibut Point Road would be shifted about 120 feet south of its current location. A new visitor and employee parking lot for 34 vehicles and two buses would be constructed between the new office and

the existing warehouse. Parking for up to 20 vehicles, including seven government vehicles, would be constructed in the area southeast of the warehouse.

Site work would occur and crushed aggregate and ultimately bituminous asphalt treatment would be applied. New curb and gutter would be installed in an effort to facilitate proper drainage as well as sidewalks for pedestrian traffic. About 460 lineal feet of privacy fence would be built around the warehouse parking and storage area to provide security. The installation of parking area lighting would also discourage vandalism.

The initial stages of the overall proposal for the Sitka Offices project will entail architectural and engineering services to provide detailed plans, specifications and engineering estimated costs for the project. Contract action and implementation of construction would be pending funding availability in the future. It is expected that demolition/removal of existing structures would cost \$50,000 to \$75,000. Construction, paving, fencing, and eventual landscaping is expected to cost approximately \$4,500,000 (Table 3-2). This project may be completed in phases as funding becomes available.

The only known hazmat issues are associated with the removal of the existing residence. If the residence is sold to the public, no abatement action is required for the lead based paint and asbestos containing materials. If the building is demolished, the lead based paint and asbestos containing materials would be removed by a certified abatement contractor. The demolished materials could then be sold locally, recycled, or disposed in the Sitka construction debris landfill. Best Management Practices would be exercised during construction of this project. Proposed activities, including design and construction, are expected to take from three to four years to complete, but may be split up into several phases over several years depending on funding, timing, and contracting. If funding is available, we would expect to start the design phase in 2010.

Alternative C

Under Alternative C activities as described in Chapter 2 would occur. The effects would generally be the same as Alternative B, but with the following differences: The mobile home at 2116 Halibut Point Road #2 would be relocated uphill about 100 feet to the pad at 2116 Halibut Point Road #4. Approximately 1.8 acres of ground would be disturbed at the Cascade Creek Administrative Site to complete all activities. The site's northern driveway/access road on Halibut Point Road would be shifted about 100 feet south of its current location. A new access road would be developed north of the office to Kramer Avenue, eliminating one mobile home pad. A 50 foot culvert would be installed where the new site access road crosses the stream. A new visitor and employee parking lot for 25 vehicles and two buses would be constructed between the new office and the existing warehouse. Parking for 10 employees would be constructed between the new office and Kramer Avenue.

Cumulative Effects

Currently most of the vehicle traffic at Cascade Creek Administrative Site is during the workday by Forest Service personnel using the warehouse and shop. The volume of traffic turning into and leaving the site will increase by locating the new office at the site. However, independent of this project, traffic turning onto and leaving Kramer Avenue will significantly increase with the development of up to 150 lots in the Whitcomb Heights subdivision. The City and Borough of Sitka is requesting an extension of the road easement of 10 to 15 feet in

some locations into Cascade Creek Administrative Site to install curbs, gutters and sidewalks. The area of impact is less than 0.1 acre.

The Tongass National Forest facilities maintenance program developed a strategy to decommission 41 Forest Service buildings in an effort to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog and eliminate annual maintenance costs. The soils lab, pole building, and tree cooler are part of this strategy and will be decommissioned as funds become available.

The facilities maintenance program will retrofit 4,100 ft² of the second floor of the warehouse into office space for up to 24 Forest Service employees. The warehouse first floor “every day” storage areas will remain in use. The contents of the second floor will be stored in small rented storage units at commercial storage companies. The warehouse second floor will be used as “swing” office space with the long term plan to revert the space back to storage if the Sitka workforce declines.

Fisheries

Affected Environment

The four-acre project area is located about 40 feet above sea level, and 100 feet from the shoreline.

The project area was surveyed in February 2009 to assess the presence of fish. Four fish Management Indicator Species (MIS) have been identified for the Tongass National Forest: pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Dolly Varden char (*Salvelinus malma malma*), and cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki*).

There are no U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed threatened or endangered fish species in Alaska and none of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed stocks of salmon or steelhead originate in Alaskan streams. Since no effect to threatened or endangered fish species are expected, they will not be discussed further here.

There is a small stream running through the proposed project area on the north end. This stream is very small and empties on the sea side of Halibut Point Road in rip-rap above mean high tide. None of the four MIS species occur in this stream. A small tributary to Cascade Creek, on the eastern boundary of the project area, may contain rearing habitat for coho salmon. Cascade Creek lies just outside the project area to the south. Cascade Creek supports populations of pink, coho, and chum salmon and may support small Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout populations. The marine environment, about 100 feet west of the project area, may contain all four MIS. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) submits a list of waters to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that persistently exceed water quality standards and/or exhibit impairment of uses. According to the ADEC (2008), there are no listed waterbodies within the project area.

The small stream which runs through the north end of the project area does not support salmon or trout populations, but may contain sculpin. Biologists walked the stream in February 2009, and no sculpins were observed. However, in the winter, sculpin may be fairly sedentary and holed up in protected locations because of scarcity of food and energy

conservation, so if sculpin were present, they may not have been observed. The outlet of the stream empties through a 36-inch culvert which runs under Halibut Point Road and comes out above high tide on rocky shoreline habitat. Due to shallow water depth, small width, and a 18 inch drop from the pipe, no marine fish would be able to migrate up this stream, but there could possibly be downstream emigration of sculpin from the stream to the ocean. Upstream from the Halibut Point Road crossing, the stream's full bank width is between 3 and 6 feet wide, and contains potential sculpin habitat. About 200 feet upstream of the Halibut Point crossing, the stream runs into the project area through two culverts under Kramer Avenue and National Forest System Road #7598. There is a gradient barrier from the main channel and the tributary directly downstream of these culverts. The water upstream of Kramer Avenue comes from drainage ditches along the sides of the road, which is unsuitable as fish habitat.

Potential sculpin freshwater Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) has been identified for a total of 200 feet of the stream located in the north end of the project area. Sculpin EFH has been defined for juveniles and adults in the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (NMFS 2009).

Environmental Consequences

Level of Effects Definitions:

Negligible: No species would be affected or the action would affect an individual but the change would be so small that it would not be of any measurable or perceptible consequence to the individual or its population.

Minor: An individual would be affected but the change would be small. Impacts would be detectable, but they would not be expected to have any long-term effects on species or their habitats, or the natural processes sustaining them. Occasional responses to disturbance by some individuals could be expected, but without interference to reproduction, or other factors affecting population levels. Sufficient habitat will remain functional to maintain viability of all species.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A (No Action)

Alternative A will not cause any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on MIS or sculpin habitat (freshwater EFH) beyond what already occurs because existing conditions would remain unchanged. Existing direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on Cascade Creek and the stream in the northern section of the project area are increased runoff from current development. However, these effects are negligible because the effects on freshwater are very small, and do not affect the marine environment downstream.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) and Alternative C

None of the alternatives would cause any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on MIS fish beyond what already occurs because existing conditions would remain unchanged in the Cascade Creek tributary (and Cascade Creek) where MIS fish are present. Direct, indirect,

and cumulative effects on the Cascade Creek tributary are negligible. Runoff occurs from the current development on and above the project area. However, these effects on freshwater are very small, and have negligible affect on the marine environment.

Alternative B may cause negligible direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on sculpin habitat beyond what already occurs because habitat will be altered slightly to accommodate an additional foot bridge and trail across the northern stream. There may also be some temporary negligible direct and indirect effects due to runoff from construction and trail building activities. All effects would be very small, and will only negligibly affect the marine environment downstream during construction activities. Under Alternative B, the Cascade Creek tributary EFH will not be affected beyond existing conditions. The size and scope of these watersheds are so small it may only negligibly affect salmon EFH in the downstream marine environments.

Alternative C may cause temporary minor direct and indirect effects on sculpin EFH because of disturbance and increased sedimentation during culvert installation and driveway construction over the northern stream. Under Alternative C, the Cascade Creek tributary EFH will not be affected beyond existing conditions. The size and scope of these watersheds are so small it may only negligibly affect salmon EFH in the downstream marine environments.

Cumulative Effects

There is a potential for minor cumulative effects from heavy sediment loading as culvert installation and construction activities occur in the project area, and as the City and Borough of Sitka works on roads and drainages in developing the Whitcomb Heights subdivision upstream and upland from the project area, because the two activities may occur at the same time. However, the scope and size of the affected stream section is small (200 ft), and it is unclear at this point if sculpin are present in the system. Cumulative effects downstream in the marine environment will be negligible due to the small size of the watershed. Long term direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will be negligible because the culvert would be sized to meet watershed needs, and sculpin EFH habitat should return back to or be better than existing conditions in the stream.

EFH Assessment

This assessment follows the consultation procedures documented in an attachment to a June 26, 2007 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) letter to the Regional Forester. Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) is defined as “those waters and substrates necessary for fish spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.” Freshwater EFH includes streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, wetlands and other bodies of water currently and historically accessible to anadromous fish. Marine EFH includes estuarine and marine areas from tidally submerged habitat to the 200-mile exclusive economic zone. The first step in the consultation process is the Forest Service’s determination if the proposed action will have “no adverse effect” or if it “may adversely affect” EFH. Only a “may adversely affect” determination triggers consultation. The EFH assessment includes, at a minimum: (1) A description of the proposed action (the Proposed Action is listed above in this report); (2) an analysis of the potential adverse effects of the action on EFH and the managed species; (3)

the Forest Service’s conclusions regarding the effects of the action on EFH; and (4) proposed mitigation, if applicable.

Alternative A would have “no adverse effects” on EFH, because existing conditions would remain unchanged.

Alternative B would have “no adverse effects” on EFH because the small scope and scale of the actions around the drainages would not impact fish habitat. This project would not cause erosion or sedimentation which could reduce quality or quantity of fish habitat in the freshwater or marine environment downstream of the analysis area.

Alternative C “may adversely effect” sculpin EFH because habitat will be modified temporarily with placement of the culvert which will temporarily increase sediment loading. It is not known at this point in time if sculpin are present in the northern-most stream in the project area. Design criteria of instream work will minimize sediment input to the stream. However, there will be no long term effects to the stream with this alternative. The size and scope of the watershed is so small it will not affect enough EFH to see overall sculpin population effects in the Sitka area.

Heritage

Affected Environment

The plan for development of the office and associated area has discreet boundaries and impacts will be limited to those boundaries; however, adjustments to the construction locations may occur. The four-acre administrative site on which the new office and parking lot will be built will constitute the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for Heritage Resources. The APE as it has been considered for this investigation is much larger than that of the actual project area. The APE as it has been identified for this project takes into consideration the effects of construction realizing that the effects of construction often times extend beyond the foot print of an actual building; there are often staging areas for materials, trash, vehicles and job site trailers. The majority of the Cascade Creek Administrative Site, including the project area, has been modified to some degree by past land development. It is difficult, on the basis of surface observations and sub-surface probing, to determine the extent of those disturbances.

The project area is located within the High Sensitivity Zones for heritage resources as defined in the Region 10 Programmatic Agreement between the USDA Forest Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (USDA Forest Service 2002).

There have been no previous archaeological investigations conducted for the current project’s area of potential effect. Three previous projects occurred within close proximity to the project but remain outside the project area (see Table 3-3). The residence on the property is within the project’s area of potential effect and dates to 1959 making it a historic structure according to the National Historic Preservation Act as amended. No other historic properties are known to exist in the project’s area of potential effect.

Table 3-3. Previous Cultural Resource Projects in or Near the New Office APE

Year	Project Name	Author	Project Number
1990	Sitka & Borough of Sitka Sandy Beach Sewer Line	Davis, Stan	R1990100531038
1997	Betterman Driveway Easement	Iwamoto, Karen	R1997100521102
2006	Cross Trail Extension Project	Karchut, Jeremy	R2006100531011

The building within the project’s area of potential affect has been included in a cultural resource report (*A Level III Heritage Resource Investigation for the Sitka Ranger District Office and Administrative Complex*). This report includes an evaluation of the historic building and results of the survey and sub-surface testing. This heritage resources report is in progress. It is the Forest Services intent to submit a cultural resources report to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) upon completion to comply with 36CFR800. The Forest Service will take into consideration comments and mitigations proposed by SHPO regarding this project. A decision on this project is not expected until an effort has been made to consult to an end where a consensus agreement has been made with SHPO regarding this project.

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A (No Action)

A “No Action” decision would have no direct or indirect effect on historic properties, known or as yet undiscovered.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) and Alternative C

The potential for this project to directly effect a Historic Property as defined in 36CFR800 is unlikely. It is evident that much excavation and dirt work has been done in the project area over the years. Knowledge of previous activities at this site is limited; previous disturbance from WWII and post WWII Forest Service activities are likely. There is evidence that the natural topography has been altered to increase and level the buildable space. There remains a possibility that Historic properties may exist sub-surface in the area of potential effects for heritage.

Due to the lack of historic documentation regarding the amount of excavation and fill, it is not feasible to determine the depths of non native fill material. It is unknown whether there are any sites below the levels of prior disturbance for this project’s area of potential effect.

Provided that monitoring is conducted, a consensus determination is received regarding the historic building identified as Not Eligible for Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and consensus determination of No Historic Properties Affected for this

project is reached with SHPO and all parties identified in 36CFR800, there are no direct effects anticipated from this project.

At the present time there are no known indirect effects to heritage resources. The majority of the Cascade Creek Administrative Site, including the current project area, has been modified to some degree by past land development. It is difficult, on the basis of surface observations and sub-surface probing, to determine the extent of those disturbances. Provided that no Historic Properties are identified during the monitoring of this project there will be no indirect effects.

Cumulative Effects

No cumulative effects are foreseen for this project provided a consensus agreement is reached on the eligibility of the historic building. Monitoring of excavation of the project area will limit any possibilities of cumulative effects from this project.

Wildlife

Affected Environment

The total project area covers about four acres, and is located about 40 feet above sea level, and 100 feet from the shoreline. Most of the area within the proposed site has been cleared.

There is already a high amount of human disturbance in and around the project area due to the presence of a state highway, residential buildings, and a developed Forest Service warehouse and other facilities. The Sitka Office project area does not provide habitat for most wildlife species.

Management Indicator Species (MIS)

Management indicator species (MIS) are vertebrates or invertebrates species whose response to land management activities can be used to predict the likely response of other species with similar habitat requirements. Thirteen wildlife and four fish species have been identified as MIS for the Tongass National Forest. Only those MIS that have habitat in the Sitka Office project area will be discussed here, since those are the only species which would be affected by a change in habitat (see Table 3-4). The MIS resource report is located in the project planning record. Information from this report is summarized here.

Surveys of species have not been done in the Sitka Office project area, though several observational site visits have been done. Information used to prepare this report includes reports and information from other agencies and discussions with District biologists.

Table 3-4. Wildlife species listed as MIS for the Tongass National Forest that are suspected to occur, or have habitat in or adjacent to the Sitka Office project area.

Species	Habitat and Occurrence in the Project Area
Bald Eagle	Bald eagles are associated with large old trees along the coast and within riparian areas. No nesting occurs in or adjacent to the project area. Perching may occur in the project area
Sitka black-tailed Deer	Sitka black-tailed deer have been seen in and around the project area though it provides limited habitat. Low-elevation (below 800 feet), high-volume old-growth stands with southern aspects and in low snowfall areas are assumed to provide the best quality deer winter habitat.
Brown bear	Brown bears (<i>Ursus arctos</i>) use areas from sea level to the alpine and are habitat generalists. Brown bears have been observed in and around the project area
Red Squirrel	Red squirrels use old and young forests with cone-producing trees, and cavities in trees and snags for nesting and denning. Red squirrels have been observed in and around the project area

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive (TEPS) Animal Listed Species

Biological Evaluations were completed to determine whether the proposed alternatives would have direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on plant and animals species formally listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service as threatened, endangered, or proposed for listing. The Biological Evaluations are located in the project planning record. Information from the wildlife report is summarized here.

No threatened, endangered, or proposed species occur in the analysis area for this project. Only the endangered humpback whale and the threatened Steller sea lion are commonly observed in the coastal waters of the Tongass National Forest and inhabit the marine waters adjacent to the project area. National Forest management activities that could have an effect on habitats or populations of these species generally fall into the categories of direct disturbance, acoustic disturbance, and habitat degradation (including effects to prey species). These effects are generally associated with the development and use of marine access facilities, increased marine activities, and activities that alter stream habitat that flows into marine environments.

The Alaska Region of the Forest Service has identified five sensitive animals that are found on the Tongass National Forest. None of the animal species listed as sensitive (Kittlitz murrelet, Queen Charlotte goshawk, Aleutian tern, black oystercatcher, or Dusky Canada goose) have been documented in or around the project area; additionally, the Sitka Office building project area does not provide habitat for any of these species. The Biological Evaluation, located in the project planning record, addresses the affects of the action alternative on these species.

Migratory Birds

Neotropical migratory birds (referred to as migratory birds) are far ranging species that require a diversity of habitat for foraging, breeding, and wintering. Over 100 species of birds migrate from the lower forty-eight states, and Central and South America, to nesting, breeding, and rearing grounds in Alaska. Most of the birds fly to the interior or northern Alaska and only pass through Southeast Alaska on their way to the breeding grounds. The Tongass National Forest has identified 40 migratory bird species that may occur on the forest. There are small numbers of migratory birds that may breed in the project area.

Environmental Consequences

Level of Effects Definitions:

See definitions under “Fisheries”

Direct and Indirect Effects and Cumulative Effects

Management Indicator Species

Alternative A (No Action)

Alternative A would not cause any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on wildlife MIS beyond what already occurs because existing conditions would remain unchanged, and the project area is located in an urbanized setting. Background noise and activity associated with use of the Forest Service compound would continue. Effects of these ongoing activities on management indicator species would continue.

Proposed Action (Alternative B) and Alternative C:

At the project level, there is a low risk of impacts to MIS because activities will occur in a previously developed site that does not provide quality habitat for most of these species.

MIS species which now avoid the area would continue to avoid the area, while other species may continue to use the area despite land changes and increased human presence.

Habitats that are key to MIS species will not be affected.

Alternatives B and C may have negligible direct and indirect effects on individual bald eagle, brown bear, red squirrel, and Sitka black-tail deer. Some young growth trees and habitat will be removed, which may cause individuals to avoid or emigrate outside of the area. However, disturbance is already occurring, and new habitat altering activities are of limited size and scope. Animals that are currently avoiding the area would continue to avoid the area, while some animals may continue to use the area despite land changes and increased human presence.

See the MIS and other species report in the Planning Record for more details.

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive (TEPS) Animal Species

Alternatives A, B and C

All three alternatives would have “no effect” on species listed by the USFWS or their habitat because there are no listed species in the analysis area. None of the alternatives would cause a direct effect to the humpback whale and Steller sea lion because there would be no marine activities associated with this project. Both Alternatives B and C may have negligible indirect effects. There is a possibility of increasing the sediment load carried to the marine environment because of the construction/demolition activities. These effects should be very small and temporary due to implementation of BMPs. All three alternatives would have “no effect” on species listed by the NMFS or their habitat because the species do not occur in or around the analysis area or effects to individuals or their habitat will be negligible and critical habitat will not be affected.

Because of the lack of presence and habitat, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to sensitive species are expected from any alternative.

Migratory Birds

Alternatives A, B, and C

Alternative A would not cause any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on migratory birds beyond what already occurs because existing conditions would remain unchanged, and the project area is already located in an urbanized setting.

Alternatives B and C may have negligible direct and indirect effect on migratory birds because a small stand of young alder and conifers will be removed, though habitat altering activities are of limited size and scope, and the project area is already highly developed. Given the current level of human presence, some of these species already avoid the area and would continue to avoid the area, while some species would continue to use the area despite the human use.

Cumulative Effects

Alternatives B and C should not produce any cumulative effects because they would not alter habitat that could affect migratory birds in the long term.

Subsistence Uses _____

Affected Environment

Consistent with Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), this project was evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. Subsistence analysis usually focuses on three factors relating to fish and wildlife resources. These are: 1) abundance and distribution of the resource; 2) access to the resource; and 3) competition for the resource. The Forest Plan determined that the primary subsistence resource likely to be significantly affected by Forest Plan actions was

the Sitka black-tailed deer. Therefore, deer are considered the “indicator” for potential subsistence resource consequences concerning the abundance and distribution of the resources (USDA 2008b).

The community of Sitka is classified as rural and receives subsistence priorities under ANILCA. Subsistence fishing may occur where fish-bearing streams occur (i.e. Cascade Creek). Subsistence plant gathering may occur in the analysis area where salmonberry and other preferred plants may occur. Both state and federal regulations prohibit hunting in the project area because of the proximity of a state highway and residential neighborhoods.

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects and Cumulative Effects

Alternative A (No Action)

Alternative A would not cause any direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on Sitka black-tailed deer beyond what already occurs because existing conditions would remain unchanged, and the project area is already located in an urbanized setting.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) and Alternative C

Alternatives B and C may have negligible direct and indirect effect on individual Sitka black-tailed deer by causing avoidance of the project area, but no population effects would occur. Given the current level of human presence and disturbance, some deer avoid the area and would continue to avoid the area, while other individuals would continue to use the area despite the human use. Additionally the amount of native vegetation is expected to be similar before and after project implementation. None of the alternatives would result in a change or restriction of access to subsistence resources or change distribution of hunting.

Given this, there would not be any direct or indirect effects on the abundance and distribution, access to, or competition for subsistence resources. Since there would be no direct or indirect effects to subsistence resources there would be no cumulative effects to subsistence resources. Because there would be no change in abundance and distribution of, access to and competition for subsistence resources, all of the alternatives would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other foods.

Plants and Timber _____

Affected Environment

All of the project area is modified by previous development and current uses. Most of the project area is maintained as a gravel parking, storage, and lawn. All of the area was previously cleared and a large part of the area was filled during previous construction. A small perennial stream channel bisects the project area. Red alder and salmonberry grow

along the channel, as a narrow corridor. A mixture of native and non-native grasses, various weeds and a few native ferns and forbs are the under-story vegetation.

The only plant federally listed or proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska is *Polystichum aleuticum* C. Christesen, which is endangered. It is only known from Adak Island and is not expected to occur in the project area. Eighteen vascular plant species are designated by the Regional Forester as sensitive in the Alaska Region (USDA Forest Service 2009b). Five of these species occur and two potentially occur on the Sitka Ranger District (USDA Forest Service 2009b). The pre-field review for this project found that no likely sensitive plant habitat exists in the project area; no sensitive plant species are expected to grow in this modified habitat. Habitat information was obtained from site visits.

One special interest plant is suspected of occurring in the project area - *Glyceria leptostachya*, or Davy mannagrass. This species was removed from the Sensitive Species List (2009b), but still has an ANHP ranking of S2 (Imperiled in state). The 2009 Revised Sensitive Species Report cites an expanding distribution and apparent trend of population increase as reasons for taking Davy mannagrass off the list. An earlier report on this species describes Davy mannagrass as a colonizing species that will benefit from ground disturbing projects (Bella, 2002). In Sitka, Petersburg and Wrangell, it is often found in close association with many weed species and rarely in a natural setting.

Invasive plant surveys were conducted for most of the project area on August 14, 2007 (Pohl and Bosworth). Twenty-three non-native plant species were found in the warehouse compound and roadsides of the project area. The roadsides are managed by the Alaska Department of Transportation. All of these species are already relatively widespread in Sitka and southeast Alaska. Because of this fact, the project has little risk of causing any significant spread of the existing invasive species. Some of the species will be nearly impossible to eradicate or control because they are common along Halibut Point Road and roads are primary vectors for spreading weeds. Oxeye daisy and purple foxglove would be targeted for control because they represent bad choices as landscape plants and they spread along forest roads, meadows and beaches. Reed canary grass is the most invasive species known in the project area and would be controlled in maintained areas of the new office complex, but would be very difficult to control along the roadside, salmonberry hedges and the drainage ditch.

Plants treated as invasive in this document are derived from the Alaska Natural Heritage Program's Weed Ranking Project (ANHP 2008).

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A (No Action)

The No Action Alternative would have no effect on plants beyond that occurring due to ongoing disturbance.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) and Alternative C

Based on the habitat assessment of the area, the determination of effects for all sensitive species known or suspected to occur on Sitka Ranger District is "**No Impact**" due to the lack of presence or habitat for sensitive plants. No Sensitive plant species are expected to grow in this modified habitat. No federally threatened, endangered, or proposed plants would be affected since they do not occur in this part of Alaska.

Demolition, construction and landscaping activities would cause ground disturbance over at least 1.5 acres of the project area. Construction of a parking area and office would permanently cover some areas currently in use as lawn, outbuildings and areas of unmaintained salmonberry thickets. The special interest plant, *Glyceria leptostachya*, may be affected in the project area, especially by burying the powerlines near the ditch. Individual plants may be destroyed but overall the plant should benefit because it thrives in disturbed habitats.

General vegetation would be altered by removal of some existing vegetation, mostly salmonberry thickets and young spruce, hemlock and red alder trees. An intended effect of the landscaping would be to improve the look of the grounds. An appropriate landscape design will be developed for the site. Invasive species are often spread by ground disturbance but this would be mitigated by landscaping and weed control efforts. Removal of soil and overburden from the site would move weed species to the landfill, but the landfill is already expected to have these species. Soil brought to the site could contain invasive species and landscape plants are a known source of many invasive species.

Ground disturbance and vegetation clearing would cause a short term increase in the potential for erosion and invasive plants to spread on or off the site. Construction of the new office and parking area(s) would increase water runoff from the site. Increased water in the ditches may favor *Glyceria leptostachya* which thrives in saturated soils or shallow water.

Cumulative Effects

Recent clearing and utility construction for the future Whitcomb Heights subdivision, future re-construction of Kramer Avenue and future home construction activities in the subdivision would create a construction and disturbance corridor that favors the spread of invasive species. This corridor is connected to the Sitka Office project area, however the spread of invasive species into the subdivision is largely outside the control of the Forest Service and would occur independently of this project. Any treatment of invasive species by the Forest Service might slow future spread of those particular species.

The Whitcomb Heights subdivision would eventually result in the loss of many acres of forest and forested wetlands north of the project area. Again, this effect is independent of this project, and the loss of native plant communities and potential special interest plants in that area is attributable to the subdivision development.

Federal and Local Permits and Certifications _____

To proceed with office construction and related activities as addressed in this EA, various permits or certifications will be obtained from federal and local agencies. The following permit would be obtained for Sitka Office project:

- Storm water discharge permit/National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System review (Section 402 of the Clean Water Act) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

In addition to the above permit, the Forest Service is required to obtain concurrence from the State of Alaska, Department of Coastal and Ocean Management (in the Department of Natural Resources) on a coastal zone consistency determination to proceed with the proposed action.

Applicable Laws and Executive Orders _____

Many federal laws and Executive Orders pertain to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on federal lands. While most of the laws and Executive Orders listed below pertain to all federal lands, some of the laws are specific to Alaska.

Findings and Disclosures

Several of the laws and executive orders listed below require project-specific findings or other disclosures. These apply to federal land management projects and activities and are included here and in the Decision Notice. They apply to all alternatives considered in detail in this EA.

National Forest Management Act

All project alternatives fully comply with the 2008 Tongass Forest Plan. This project incorporates all applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines as they apply to the project area and complies with Forest Plan goals and objectives. All required interagency review and coordination has been accomplished; new or revised measures resulting from this review have been incorporated.

The Forest Plan complies with all resource integration and management requirements of 36 CFR 219 (219.14 through 219.27). Application of Forest Plan direction for the Sitka Office project ensures compliance at the project level.

Endangered Species Act

None of the alternatives is anticipated to have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any threatened or endangered species in or outside the project area. A complete Biological Evaluation (BE) is included in the planning record. The project received verbal concurrence from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on threatened and endangered species.

National Historic Preservation Act

Heritage resource survey and testing of the area of potential effects have been conducted in the Sitka Office project area, following inventory protocols agreed upon in the above-mentioned Programmatic Agreement. Tribal governments and Alaska Native Corporations have been contacted and public comment encouraged. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is in progress. One historic building identified during this investigation has been determined to be not eligible for nomination to the NRHP by the Forest Service pending a concurring determination from the State Historic Preservation Office. No effects on historic properties are anticipated.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

An ANILCA Section 810 subsistence evaluation was conducted. The proposed alternatives would have no significant restrictions on the abundance and distribution of, access to, or competition for subsistence resources in the project area. No project activities will result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other foods. The project ensures reasonable access to subsistence uses as prescribed in ANILCA Section 811.

Clean Water Act

The Forest Service must apply Best Management Practices that are consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations to achieve Alaska Water Quality Standards. The site-specific application of BMPs, with a monitoring and feedback mechanism, is the approved strategy for controlling nonpoint source pollution as defined by Alaska's Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Strategy (October 2000). In 1997, The State approved the BMPs in the Forest Service's Soil and Water Conservation Handbook (FSH Handbook 2509.22, October 1996) as consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations. This Handbook is incorporated into the Tongass Land Management Plan.

Clean Air Act

Emissions anticipated from the implementation of any alternative would be of short duration and are not expected to exceed State of Alaska ambient air quality standards (18 AAC 50).

Coastal Zone Management Act

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) requires that the Forest Service, when conducting or authorizing activities or development be consistent with the approved Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP) to the maximum extent practicable. Sub-section 202.B. of the Memorandum of Understanding between the State of Alaska and the USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region on Coastal Zone Management/Alaska Coastal Management Program Consistency Reviews, (MOU), lists Forest Service activities which require documentation in an EA or EIS, and may affect the coastal zone, and therefore normally require a consistency determination or a negative determination. This project is not listed in subsection 202.B.1.; however, the Forest Service must determine whether there are effects to the coastal zone. Upon review of all input and comments relating to effects on the coastal resources, review of the ACMP, the City and Borough of Sitka plan, the requirements of the MOU, and all applicable standards and guidelines, the Sitka Ranger District determined that

there are no effects to the coastal zone as a result of this project and therefore no consistency determination is required. This project would not affect public access, recreational opportunities and coastal resources.

Executive Order 11593

E.O. 11593 directs federal agencies to provide leadership in preserving, restoring, and maintaining the historic and cultural environment of the nation. Recognition of the historic setting of the Sitka compound and conduct of the archaeological survey and testing in compliance with the NHPA Section 106 is compliant with the executive order.

Executive Order 11988

Effects on floodplains or riparian areas have been avoided or minimized as much as possible.

Executive Order 11990

Executive Order 11990 requires federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, the long-term and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands. There are no wetlands in the project area so no wetlands would be impacted by this project.

Executive Order 12898

Implementation of any project alternative is not anticipated to cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations. Expected effects are similar for all populations, regardless of nationality, gender, race, or income.

Executive Order 12962

With the limited scope of the project and the application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, no significant adverse effects to freshwater or marine resources are expected. Recreational fishing would not be impacted.

Executive Order 13175 (2000) and 13084 (1998): Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments

EOs 13084 and 13175 direct federal agencies to work with tribal governments in policy development and project implementation where significant tribal interests are affected by federal policies or undertakings. No concerns have been raised by Tribes or tribal corporations

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996 (hereafter referred to in this section as “the Act”) requires consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service on activities that may affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

The EFH analysis and determination for this project is in Chapter 3 of this EA.

CHAPTER 4, CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, state and local agencies, and tribes during the development of this environmental assessment:

Preparers

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Brad Kriekhaus (Sitka R.D.), Plant, Timber, and Invasive Plants
Maura Santora (Sitka R.D.), Fisheries, Watershed, Wildlife, Subsistence
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Darin Martens (Bridger-Teton N.F.), Visuals
Molly Murphy (Tongass S.O.), Engineering

Review was provided by:

Perry Edwards (Sitka R.D. journey level biologist)

Consultation and Coordination

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:

US Fish and Wildlife Service
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Coastal and Ocean Management
City and Borough of Sitka

TRIBES AND CORPORATIONS:

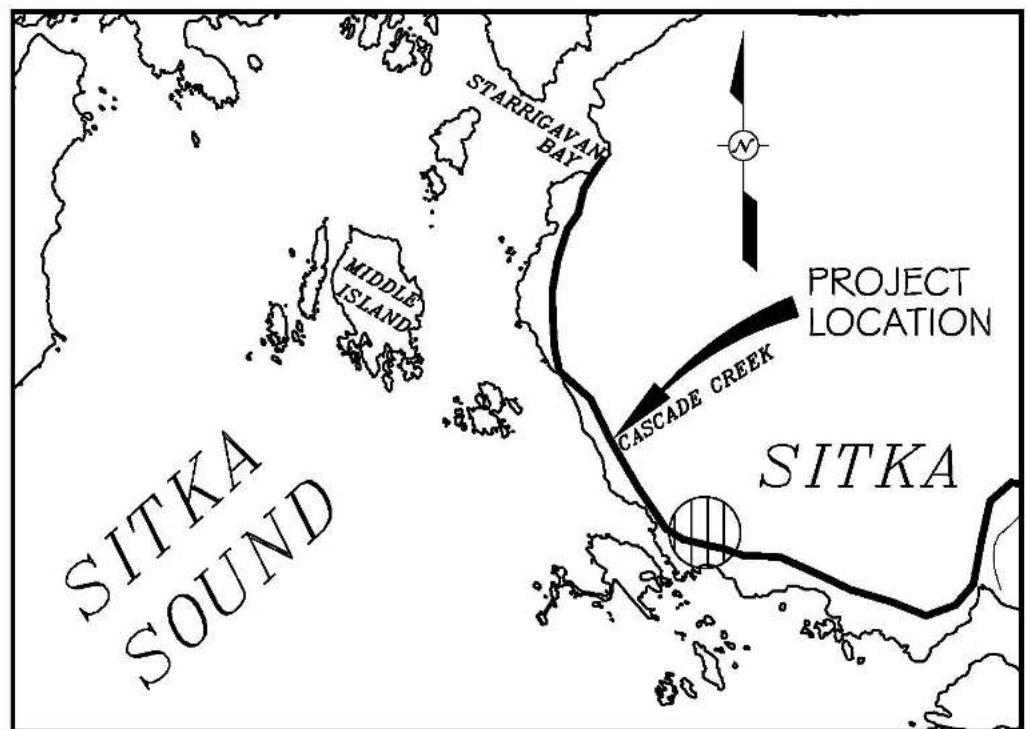
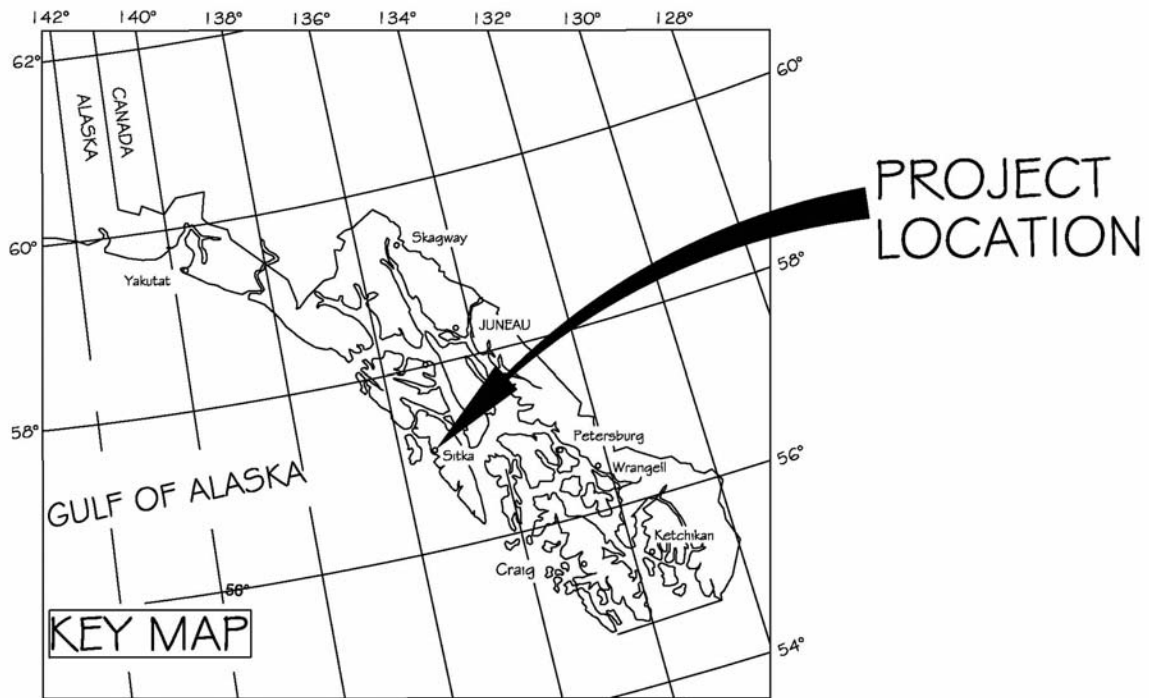
Sitka Tribe of Alaska
Shee Atika, Incorporated
Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Sealaska Corporation

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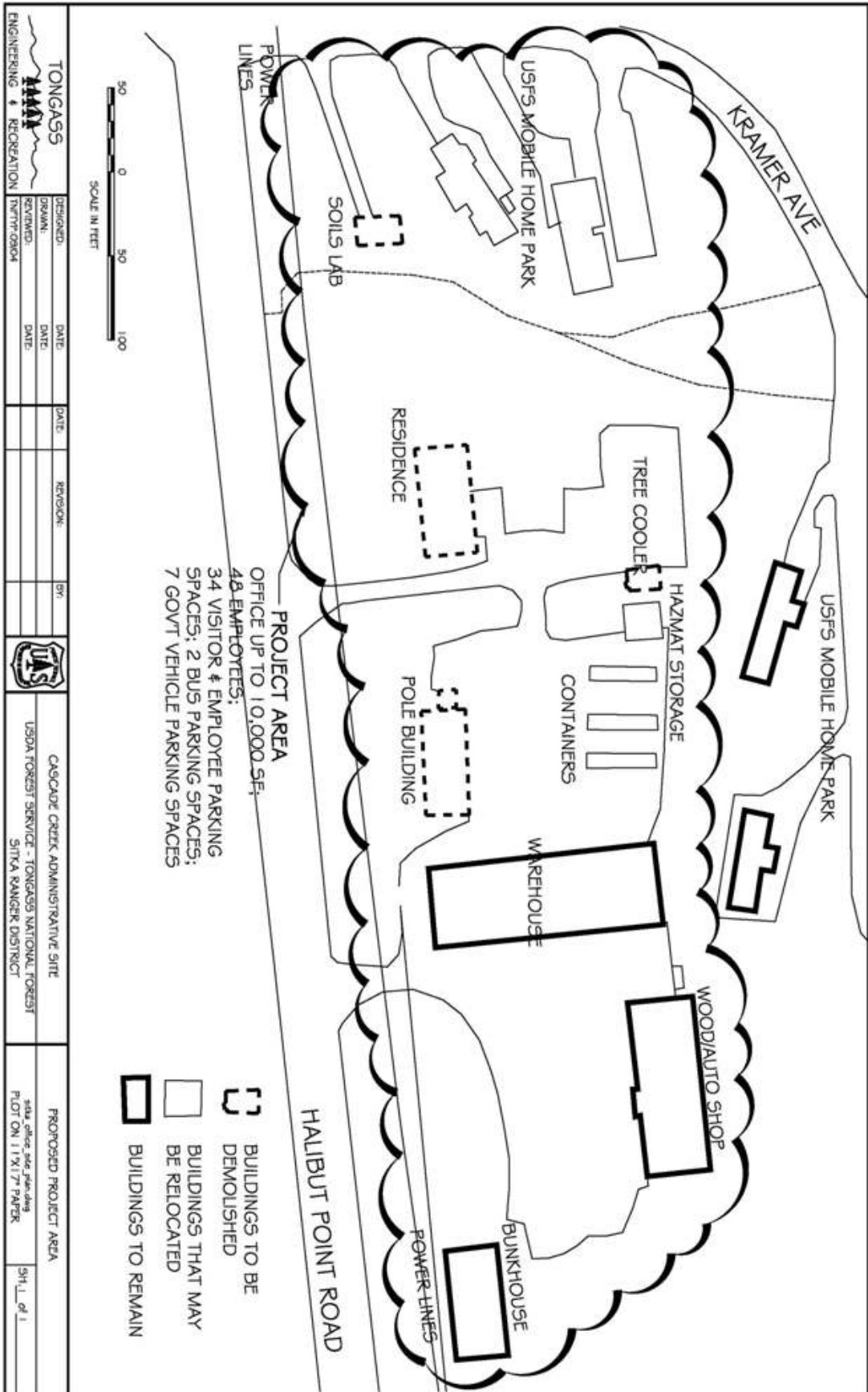
Figure 1 – Vicinity Map



VICINITY MAP



Figure 2 – Existing Condition (Alternative A – No Action)



TONGASS 	DESIGNED:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:
	DRAWN:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:
ENGINEERING & RECREATION	REVIEWED:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:	DATE:
	INVT# 09104							

	CASCADE CREEK ADMINISTRATIVE SITE	PROPOSED PROJECT AREA	5th of 1
	USDA FOREST SERVICE - TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST	FLAT ON 11' X 17' PARK	
	SITKA RANGER DISTRICT		

Figure 3 – Alternative B - Proposed Action

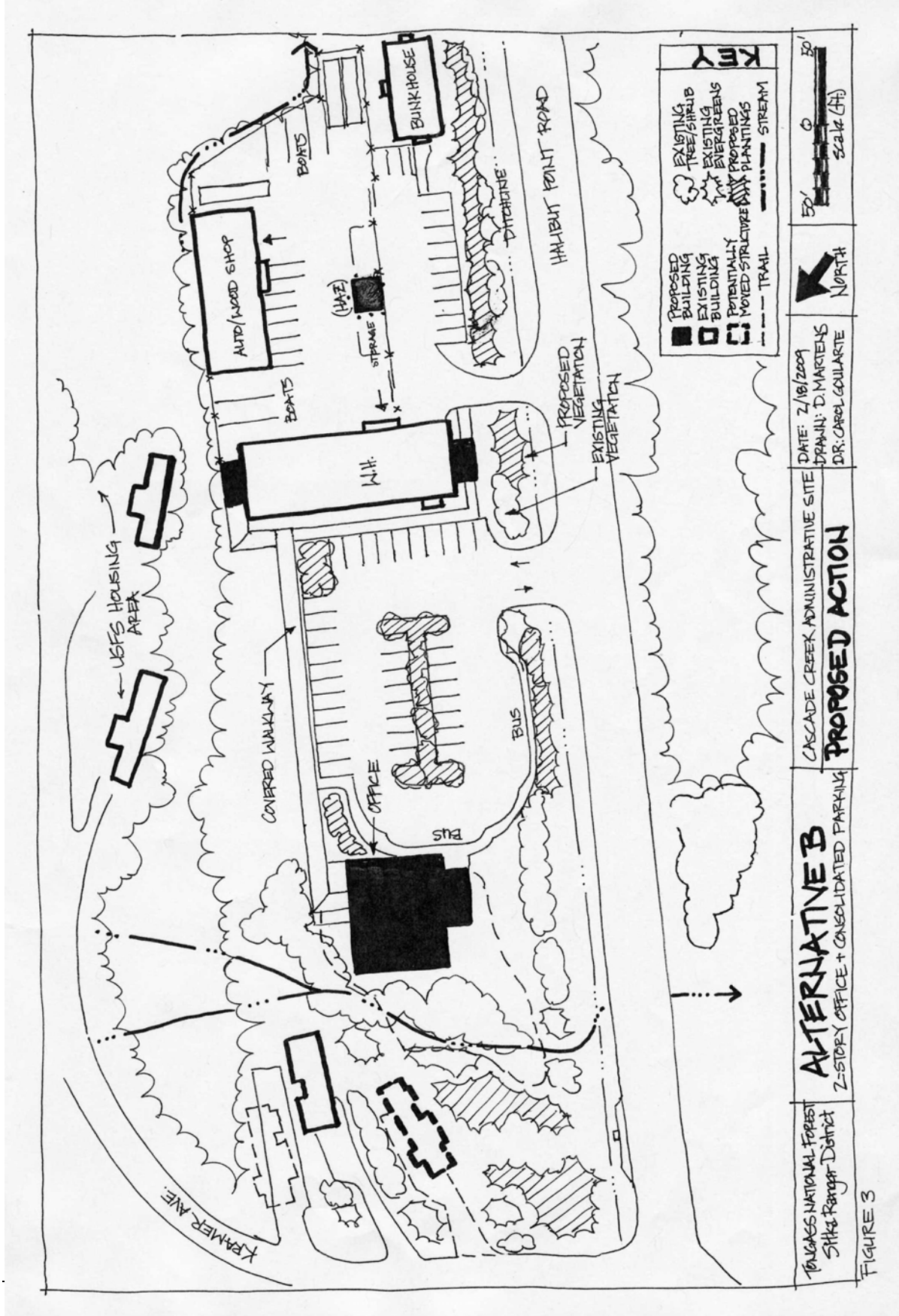


FIGURE 3

Figure 4 - Alternative C

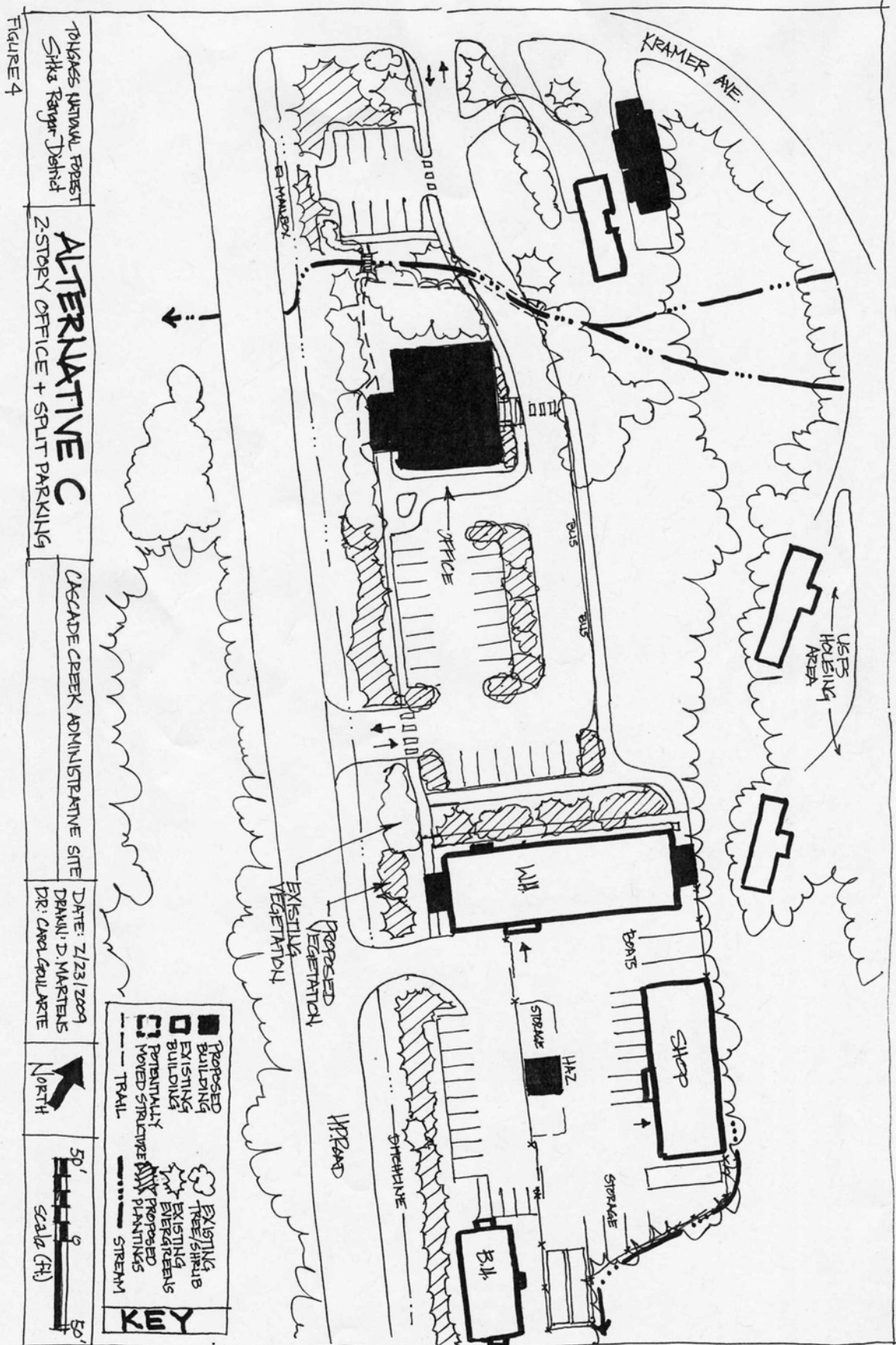


FIGURE 4

TRIGGS NATURAL FOREST
Sika Ranger District

ALTERNATIVE C
2-STORY OFFICE + SPLIT PARKING

CASCADE CREEK ADMINISTRATIVE SITE

DATE: 2/23/2009
DRAWN: D. MARTENS
DR: CAVEL/GOULARTE

NORTH

50' Scale (ft)

KEY

■	Proposed Building
□	Existing Building
○	Potentially Moved Structure
—	Trail
☁	Existing Trees/shrub
✱	Existing Evergreens
✱	Proposed Evergreens
—	Proposed Plantings
—	Stream