



File Code:1570

Date: November 24, 2003

Dear Friend of the Chugach National Forest:

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the status of winter access for the Crescent Lake/Carter Lake area near the communities of Moose Pass and Cooper Landing.

As you will recall, Alaska Regional Forester Dennis Bschor signed the Record of Decision for the Chugach Forest Plan on May 31, 2002. A number of individuals and organizations appealed various parts of the decision, one part of which included closing motorized access in the Crescent/Carter area.

In January 2003, after reviewing the appeals and the administrative record, Regional Forester Bschor withdrew that portion of his decision closing the Crescent/Carter area to winter motorized access. By withdrawing his decision for the Crescent/Carter area, management remained as it was in the original forest plan which meant it was open to winter motorized use.

Bschor directed the Forest Supervisor to reconsider this portion of the decision at the local level, with involvement from all interested parties, to make sure that the site-specific impacts of any closure were fully disclosed and that reasonable alternatives were considered. He requested that collaborative efforts start soon enough that a local decision could be implemented by the winter season (2003-2004).

In April 2003, shortly after I arrived as Forest Supervisor, Regional Forester Bschor and I met with a number of appellants and intervenors to discuss specific concerns about the Forest Plan. We heard a great deal of frustration about the volume of environmental analysis underway across the Kenai Peninsula. We also heard a strong interest expressed for taking a collaborative approach and time to better engage communities of place and communities of interest in the decision making process.

Of all the issues raised under appeal, it is clear that the Crescent/Carter area is highly valued by individuals and communities and that a local collaborative approach to help resolve motorized/non-motorized issues would be welcomed by most people. However, after considering a number of challenges faced by the Chugach National Forest including a change in leadership at the Seward Ranger District, other forest staffing issues, funding and other forest priorities, and recognizing the intense public interest in this area, it became clear to me that we were not going to be able to meet the Regional Forester's original timeframes for a decision this year.

Based upon the importance of your involvement and my desire to make a well informed decision, I requested and received additional time and resources to do the analysis and public involvement through this winter.

Consequently, this means that the Crescent/Carter area will remain open to winter motorized use this year and I anticipate that a decision will be made before the 2005 winter season commences.

The extra time will give Deb Cooper, our new Seward District Ranger, an opportunity to work with her staff and everyone interested in the outcome of the issues. District Ranger Cooper was recently the Area Ranger for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in central Idaho. She arrived on the Chugach in mid-October and is hard at work on Seward District issues. She replaces Mike Kania who accepted a new assignment in June.



We have already started the planning process by contracting with Recreation Solutions, a Forest Service Enterprise Team to provide an experienced team leader to help us gather information, formulate and analyze alternatives and involve all interested members of the public in the process. Ms. Tracy Andersen was selected as our team leader. She has extensive experience in planning and recreation issues. We have also selected employees to serve on the interdisciplinary planning team (ID team). In September Ms. Anderson hiked into the Crescent Lake/Carter Lake area with me and several members of my staff and the Seward District staff to get a first hand perspective.

We are planning community meetings in Moose Pass, Cooper Landing, and Seward to introduce District Ranger Cooper and members of the ID team and to talk with interested individuals about the Crescent/Carter area and the planning process. We will also arrange to meet in other communities if requested.

Our goal is to ensure that everyone interested in the management of the Crescent/Carter area is fully informed, understands their role in public land management decision making and has plenty of opportunity to participate in the planning process. In addition to the community meetings, we will be using a variety of methods to help keep you informed of our progress. We will publish meeting notices and announcements in local papers, send out letters/postcards and we will post regular project updates on our webpage (www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach).

Although the re-evaluation of the Crescent/Carter area will take longer than we originally anticipated, we are committed to making sure local interests are fully considered. District Ranger Cooper and I look forward to meeting with you and we invite you to join us on our collective journey so we can reach the best decision possible.

Sincerely,

s/s

Joe L. Meade

