

**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** February 12, 2024

Dear Mayor Mike Taylor,

I'm reaching out to share information regarding the upcoming revision of the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), and how your organization can be involved. The current Tongass National Forest Plan was developed over 25 years ago, in 1997. Since then, there have been many social and resource changes, a few of which were addressed in amendments to the 1997 Forest Plan while many others need to be assessed and potentially incorporated. A plan revision, which adheres to the new National Forest Management Act (NFMA) planning regulations (Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations § 219), is the next step for the Tongass National Forest.

In early calendar year 2024, the Tongass National Forest will launch the first phase of the Plan Revision process, the Assessment phase. This phase is where the Forest will identify and evaluate existing economic, social and ecological conditions in and around the Forest. This information, as well as input from the public, Alaska Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and other entities will be used to develop a new Forest Plan that will guide future project-level decisions on the Forest.

Both the NFMA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations encourage agency cooperation early in the environmental review process to help inform the analysis and establish a mechanism for active intergovernmental communication. Therefore, we are formally inviting your engagement in this process at the level of participation which is best suited for you. The options include:

- 1) Receiving email notifications of key milestones when public engagement and comment periods are available.
- 2) Participating in Intergovernmental Agency meetings to receive regular updates (tentatively planned as a quarterly convening).
- 3) Serving as a cooperating agency.

Please see the attached handout for further explanation of these different levels of engagement opportunities.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations define and describe cooperating agency status during the NEPA process. CEQ direction clarifies that the Forest Service retains the exclusive authority to make decisions on the land and resources it



administers and this authority cannot be delegated to a non-Federal entity. While it does give a more direct ability for agencies to inform planning, cooperating agency status does not give new authority to the agency that is cooperating. To foster clear understanding, the roles and responsibilities of the lead and cooperating agencies will be defined by a Memorandum of Understanding executed by all parties. As a cooperating agency, you will have the opportunity to be involved in the following activities:

- 1) Provide meaningful and early input on the range of alternatives to be considered.
- 2) Participate in coordination meetings.
- 3) We may request you develop information and prepare environmental analysis concerning your area of special expertise.
- 4) Provide timely review and comment on the pre-draft or pre-final environmental documents to reflect the views and concerns of your agency on the adequacy of the document, alternatives considered, and the anticipated impacts.

Cooperating agencies are expected to provide their own funding to support their participation in this process. Cooperating agency status is made available under the National Environmental Act, applying specifically to the portion of our planning process that occurs during the environmental analysis process that begins in 2025/2026. Therefore, it is possible to begin during the current assessment phase or increase your participation to this level of engagement further down the road, if that is of interest to you.

If you would like to join us and engage in any of these different levels of engagement or if you would like more information on what it means to be a cooperating agency, please contact Erin Mathews at [erin.mathews@usda.gov](mailto:erin.mathews@usda.gov). Your input is important in our planning process and resulting plan.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you throughout the plan revision effort and environmental review process.

Sincerely,



/s/ Francis Sherman  
FRANCIS SHERMAN  
Forest Supervisor