

INDIVIDUAL ROADLESS AREA DESCRIPTION

ROADLESS AREA NAME: Sitka Urban (331)

ACRES (NFS): 114,460

BIOGEOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: West Baranof Island

ECOLOGICAL SECTION: Baranof-Chichagof Fjordlands

2003 WILDERNESS ATTRIBUTE RATING: 20

I. Overview and Description

(1) **Location and Access:** The area is located on the west side of Baranof Island, just north of the center of the island. Sitka and Nakwasina Sounds generally border the area to the west. The roadless area is, however, for the most part separated from saltwater by private lands that are part of the Sitka developed area and extend along the shoreline. The Redoubt Roadless Area (#333) and South Baranof Wilderness border the area to the south. The North Baranof Roadless Area (#330) borders the area to the north and east.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is part of a larger roadless land area that stretches the length of Baranof Island. This area consists of four roadless areas and the South Baranof Wilderness. The four roadless areas that comprise this larger area are North Baranof (#330), Sitka Urban (#331), Redoubt (#333), and Port Alexander (#334).

There are two primary forms of access to the Sitka Urban Roadless Area. The first is on foot from the Sitka road system along the western boundary of the area. The second access is via saltwater along the west and southwest shorelines. Most of the land along these shorelines is, however, in private ownership. Access to the area is generally very good due to its proximity to the Sitka road system and the accessibility of Nakwasina, Katlian, and Silver Bays.

Four National Forest System Trails, Beaver Lake, Gavan Hill, Harbor Mountain Ridge, and Indian River Trails, provide access to the area from the Sitka road system. In addition, the Blue Lake River Trail extends 2.5 miles from the east side of Blue Lake to the south end of Glacier Lake. A survival shelter is associated with the Gavin Hill Trail. The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is adjacent to the city of Sitka. Access into the interior is by foot or helicopter. There are no places suitable for landing wheeled airplanes.

(2) **History:** This area has a long and varied history of use dating from Tlingit use in prehistoric and historic times to the present use by a variety of Alaska residents and visitors. Sitka was established between 2,000 and 9,000 years ago as a major Tlingit Indian village. Goldschmidt and Haas (1946) identified aboriginal use (including hunting/trapping, berrying, salmon, shellfish, and trolling for halibut or King Salmon) and structures along the shoreline of the area, including camps, smokehouse/cabin sites, and village sites.

The Russians settled in Sitka in 1799, made it the headquarters of the Russian American Company, and later the capital of Russian America. After sale of Alaska to the United States, Sitka served as the territorial capital until 1900, when the capital was transferred to Juneau. Although the city of Sitka lies outside the Roadless Area, its inhabitants have used the surrounding roadless lands intensively.

Use of the area since 1900 has been primarily for hunting, fishing, woodcutting, recreation, and occasional temporary occupancies. Remains of structures and other human cultural activity in varying degrees of deterioration can still be found.

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(3) Geography and Topography: The area is generally characterized by an irregular, rugged chain of mountains 2,000 to 5,300 feet in elevation. These mountains have a steep slope and are deeply indented with bays and U-shaped valleys. Numerous rocky crests and sharp ridges are found at higher elevations. Snow can be seen all year round on higher summits with a few cirque glaciers and small permanent ice fields along the eastern boundary of the area.

Streams are generally short and flow directly to saltwater with the longest about 10 miles long. Cascades are common and small mountain lakes are plentiful.

There are 12 miles of saltwater shoreline. Approximately 57 percent of the area consists of alpine tundra, ice, snow, and rock. This includes 22,435 acres of alpine, 2,927 acres of ice and snow, and 39,473 acres of rock. There are 1,815 acres of freshwater lakes in the area. Large lakes in the area include Blue Lake. The area also includes 32 acres of small islands.

(4) Ecosystem:

(a) Classification: Biogeographic Province. The area is classified as being in the West Baranof Island Biogeographic Province. Topographically, Baranof Island is the most rugged of all the islands in Southeast Alaska. The southern half of this province is highly dissected by steep-sided fiords. The outer coast is dotted with hundreds of small islands. All forest plant associations except those in the Western redcedar series and those found around large mainland rivers occur in this province.

Ecological Section/Subsection. The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is contained entirely within the Baranof-Chichagof Fjordlands Ecological Section (M247B). This area is represented by three ecological subsections (see table below). The Central Baranof Metasediments Ecological Subsection covers the vast majority of the roadless area. It has the tallest peaks, roughest terrain, and greatest extension of glaciers, icefields, and snowfields of all islands in Southeast Alaska. U-shaped valleys with precipitous walls are characteristic of this subsection. The bedrock is a mixture of metasedimentary, sedimentary, and granitic rocks. Almost half of this ecological subsection is alpine and approximately 10 percent land cover is hemlock-spruce forest where alluvial fans are present. The Sitka Sound Complex Ecological Subsection occupies most of the remainder of the roadless area. It is relatively low in elevation and there are no glaciers, although there are some permanent snowfields. Mixed conifer and hemlock-spruce forests dominate the lower elevations and shorelines, and forested wetlands of lodgepole pine and mixed conifer are abundant (Nowacki et al., 2001).

Ecological Section	Ecological Subsection	Percent of Roadless Area
Baranof-Chichagof Fjordlands	Central Baranof Metasediments	87%
	Sitka Sound Complex	13%
	Necker Bay Granitics	<1%

(b) Soils: Shallow mineral soils with good drainage can be found on steeper slopes due to rapid loss of material by erosion and efficient rainwater runoff. Deep, well drained soils commonly occur below the shallow soils on the gentler slopes where transported soil materials have collected. Poorly drained soils are found associated with low relief and impermeable subsurface layers. In locations with poor drainage, deep organic soils (muskegs) tend to form. In riparian areas, soil zones tend to contain sand and gravels as a result of flood deposition.

(c) Vegetation: The vegetation of this roadless area consists primarily of typical spruce-hemlock forests. Western hemlock-Sitka spruce dominate the overstory while the understory is composed of shrubs such as red huckleberry, rusty menziesia, and devil's club. The forest floor is covered with a mat of mosses, liverworts, and plants such as deerheart, bunchberry dogwood, single delight, and skunk cabbage. Streamside riparian vegetation is characterized by salmonberry, devil's club, alder, grasses, ferns, and currants.

Muskegs are abundant within this area, however due to their small size and association with forested sites, accurate acreage estimates are difficult and only 165 acres have been mapped. These areas, dominated by sphagnum mosses, sedges, and shrubs of the heath family, are interspersed among low elevation timber stands where drainage is restricted. Trees within the muskegs are sparse and consist mainly of stunted hemlock, Lodgepole pine, and Alaska-cedar.

At elevations generally above 2,000 feet, the plant communities are characterized by low shrubs, grasses, and sedges. Approximately 22,435 acres are mapped as alpine. Subalpine forests and meadows occur at the interface between the forested communities and the alpine tundra.

There are approximately 32,603 acres mapped as forest land, of which 13,747 acres or 42 percent are mapped as productive old-growth forest. Of the productive old growth, 3,360 acres or 24 percent are mapped as high-volume old-growth forest. The productive old growth includes about 42 acres of high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. The area also includes 668 acres of second growth where beach harvest has occurred in the past.

(d) Fish Resources: The streams and rivers in this area support runs of pink, chum, and coho salmon and Dolly Varden char. Major fish bearing streams include Indian River, Katlian River, and Coxe River (ADF&G, 2000).

(e) Wildlife Resources: There are many varied wildlife resources in this roadless area. Bird and waterfowl rearing and nesting areas are abundant in this area. Generally, the area provides good habitat for Sitka black-tailed deer, mountain goat, and brown bear. Furbearers, such as marten, mink, and river otter, may also be found here. MacDonald and Cook (1999) do not list black bear, wolves, or moose as inhabitants of Baranof Island. Bald eagle habitat, including nesting and roosting trees, can be found in this roadless area along the shorelines.

(5) Management Direction and Current Uses: This roadless area was allocated to seven different Land Use Designations (LUDs) in the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. These seven LUDs are Timber Production, Modified Landscape, Transportation and Utility System (TUS), Semi-Remote Recreation, Municipal Watershed, Remote Recreation, and Old-growth Habitat. The TUS LUD is a secondary LUD that overlays the other land uses. This LUD emphasizes potential major public utility or road systems. However, the underlying LUD guides management actions until the proposed facilities are constructed.

LUD	Acres
Timber Production	17,862
Modified Landscape	3,001
Transportation and Utility System	NA
Semi-Remote Recreation	59,421
Municipal Watershed	28,625
Remote Recreation	3,117
Old-growth Habitat	2,435

Approximately 19 percent of the roadless area (not including the TUS overlay) was allocated to a LUD that allows timber harvest and associated road construction (Timber Production and Modified Landscape). The Timber Production LUD was assigned to approximately 16 percent of the roadless area. Along the west boundary, approximately 3 percent of the roadless area was allocated to the Modified Landscape LUD. A proposed state road corridor and potential power transmission corridor that run through this area were assigned to the Transportation and Utility System LUD overlay.

Approximately 81 percent of this area was allocated to non-development LUDs (Semi-Remote Recreation, Municipal Watershed, Remote Recreation, Old-growth Habitat). Over half of the roadless area, approximately 52 percent, was allocated to the Semi-Remote Recreation LUD. The Municipal Watershed LUD was assigned to approximately 25 percent of the roadless area.

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In pockets of land in the Blue Lake and Bear Lake area, approximately 3 percent of the roadless area was allocated to the Remote Recreation LUD. The remaining 2 percent of the area was allocated to the Old-growth Habitat LUD.

The Blue Lake Hydropower plant is located on the edge of this roadless area, and the Bear Lake plant is located within it. Also, the roadless area surrounds a 22,706 tract of high value mineral land in Silver Bay.

Recreational use of the area is primarily for hunting, fishing, and enjoying the scenery. This use is scattered across the area, with the usual concentrations near lakes, streams, and shorelines. Although Outfitter/Guide Use was reported in adjacent areas in 1999, no outfitter/guide use was reported within the boundaries of the roadless area itself. Subsistence use occurs in the area. The Tongass Fish and Wildlife Resource Assessment (ADF&G, 1998) indicated that six of the eight VCUs that comprise this area are subsistence use areas with a high sensitivity to disturbance.

(6) Appearance (Apparent Naturalness): The majority of the area is considered unmodified except for those areas primarily located near the streams, trails, and shorelines with evidence of current or historic use. Older beach logging has occurred along the shoreline of Nakwasina Sound. Developed private and National Forest System lands extend along drainages into the area. These areas are excluded from the roadless area. The area displays natural characteristics when viewed from major and minor water travel routes and when inside the area. Development associated with the community of Sitka dominates the foreground from Sitka Sound. However this roadless area provides a natural background for viewers. The mountains of this roadless area form the scenic backdrop to the city of Sitka, and are a feature that attracts both residents and tourists alike to Sitka.

(7) Surroundings (External Influences): The area is bordered to the north and east by the North Baranof Roadless Area (#330). The South Baranof Wilderness and the Redoubt Roadless Area (#333) border the area to the south. As a result, there are no significant external influences on those sides of the roadless area. The western boundary, however, adjoins the developments associated with the community of Sitka, the Shee Atika Village Corporation and timber management. The external influences from these developments, air traffic in the vicinity, and from a population center that uses the area extensively, combine to affect this roadless area.

(8) Attractions and Features of Special Interest: The mountains east of Sitka are the one feature of major importance to this roadless area. These mountains form a scenic backdrop that enhances the beauty of Sitka to both visitors and residents. These same mountains also provide a watershed that provides both water and power for the community. These mountains also provide a location for the population of the community to recreate.

The area contains 27 inventoried recreation places, which cover 23,893 acres, or 21 percent of the roadless area. The natural features of the area, the scenery, and the opportunity to see wildlife are all considered attractions. High quality fishing opportunities in the streams and lakes also provide attractions. Four National Forest System Trails (Beaver Lake, Gavan Hill, Harbor Mountain Ridge, and Indian River Trails) provide access to the area from the Sitka road system. In addition, the Blue Lake River Trail extends 2.5 miles from the east side of Blue Lake to the south end of Glacier Lake. There are no public recreation cabins in the area. There is, however, a survival shelter associated with the Gavin Hill Trail.

(9) Differences between the 1989 and 2003 Roadless Area Boundary: The boundaries of the roadless area changed in three ways between 1989 and 2003. First, beach logged areas (i.e., areas that were logged but not roaded) that were excluded from the 1989 area are included within the boundaries of the 2003 area. Second, an area of non-National Forest System lands has extended further along Indian River into the area. This extended area is excluded from the roadless area. Third, several smaller areas along developed areas of the boundaries have been excluded between the Draft and Final SEIS to improve the potential manageability of the area as wilderness.

II. Capability for Management as Wilderness

(1) Natural Integrity and Apparent Naturalness: The area is unmodified except for the evidence of current and historic use of the area. However, developments into most of the major drainages and the urban area of Sitka immediately adjacent to the western boundary reduce the areas natural integrity and apparent naturalness. Overall, the area has high natural integrity and moderate to high apparent naturalness.

(2) Opportunity for Solitude and Serenity, Self-reliance, Adventure, Challenging Experiences, and Primitive Recreation: There is a high opportunity for solitude and a very high opportunity for primitive recreation within the area. Both the size of the area and the screening offered by the topography increase the opportunity for solitude and primitive recreation. Overall recreational use of the area is relatively limited and dispersed, so that encounters with other visitors are unlikely. However, recreational use along the trails at times may be moderate and concentrated, so that encounters with other visitors are likely. Because of its large size, there are many opportunities for solitude in this area, however a visitor may have to work harder to find them. The sight or sound of airplanes overhead, boats along the coastlines, motor vehicles on adjacent roads or trails, and the sights and sounds of the community of Sitka can occasionally intrude upon a visitor's solitude.

The area provides a high opportunity for primitive recreation as a result of its size, topographic screening, and physical challenges. This area has a highly irregular topography and diverse vegetation that combine to offer a setting capable of providing a variety of primitive recreation opportunities. There are lakes, ponds, streams, bays, rugged mountains, and a varied coastline that contribute to these opportunities. Although Outfitter/Guide Use was reported in adjacent areas in 1999, no outfitter/guide use was reported within the boundaries of the roadless area itself.

The area provides primarily semi-primitive recreation opportunities. The table below lists the acreage and percent of the various Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes that have been inventoried in the roadless area.

ROS Class	Acres	Percent of Total ROS
Primitive (P)	36,916	32%
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)	67,961	59%
Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)	3,378	3%
Roaded Natural (RN)	413	0%
Roaded Modified (RM)	5,769	5%
Urban (U)	3	0%

The area contains 27 inventoried recreation places, which cover 23,893 acres, or 21 percent of the roadless area.

ROS Class	# of Rec. Places*	Total Acres
P	5	4,659
SPNM	9	15,299
SPM	4	2,658
RN	5	241
RM	11	1,035
U	0	0

* Rec. Places may occur in more than one ROS Class; the sum of this column may exceed the total number of Rec. Places.

Four National Forest System Trails (Beaver Lake Trail, Gavan Hill Trail, Harbor Mountain Ridge Trail, and Indian River Trail) provide access to the area from the Sitka road system. In addition, the Blue Lake River Trail extends 2.5 miles from the east side of Blue Lake to the south end of Glacier Lake. There are no public recreation cabins in the area. There is, however, a survival shelter associated with Gavin Hill Trail.

(3) Wilderness Attribute Rating System: In 1977, the Forest Service, along with public interest groups, developed the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS), which was used to inventory the wilderness characteristics of roadless areas during the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process. The purpose of WARS was to provide a measure of the area's wilderness quality, based on the key attributes of wilderness as defined in the Wilderness Act. It is largely based on the attributes described above in items 1 and 2 of this section (natural integrity, apparent naturalness, outstanding opportunity for solitude, and primitive recreation opportunities).

In 1979, during the RARE II process, the Tongass National Forest applied WARS for the first time and rated each unroaded VCU on the Tongass. In 1989, the inventoried roadless areas (which generally include more than one VCU) were rated according to this system for the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) developed in

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support of the Forest Plan Revision. This original version of the AMS included both the individual VCU ratings done in 1979 and the composite rating that was done for each roadless area in 1989. The 1989 rating for the Sitka Urban Roadless Area was 19 out of 28 possible points. The 1989 rating was re-evaluated for this updated version of the AMS. Based on this re-evaluation, the area was given a rating of 20.

(4) Ecologic and Geologic Values: The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is part of a larger roadless land area that stretches the length of Baranof Island. This area consists of four roadless areas and the South Baranof Wilderness. The four roadless areas that comprise this larger area are North Baranof (#330), Sitka Urban (#331), Redoubt (#333), and Port Alexander (#334).

(a) Fish Resources: The Tongass Fish and Wildlife Resource Assessment (ADF&G, 1998) rated two VCUs, Katlian River (313) and Green Lake (324), as primary sportfish producers, and one VCU, Sitka (311), as a primary salmon producer.

The streams and rivers in this area support runs of pink, chum, and coho salmon and Dolly Varden char. Major fish bearing streams include Indian River, Katlian River, and Coxe River (ADF&G, 2000). The Indian River has an estimated annual peak escapement of 50,500 pink salmon and very good coho smolt capability. The Katlian River is second to the Indian River in production, with an estimated annual peak escapement of 12,200 pink salmon and good coho smolt capability. Silver Bay has an estimated annual peak escapement of 11,000 pink salmon (ADF&G, 1998).

(b) Wildlife Resources: There are many varied wildlife resources in this roadless area. Generally, the area provides good habitat for Sitka black-tailed deer, mountain goat, and brown bear. Furbearers such as marten, mink, and river otter may also be found here. Bird and waterfowl rearing and nesting areas are abundant in this area. Bald eagle habitat, including nesting and roosting trees, can be found in this roadless area along the shorelines. MacDonald and Cook (1999) do not list black bear, wolves, or moose as inhabitants of Baranof Island.

(c) Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species: The only federally listed threatened or endangered species likely to occur within or adjacent to the roadless area are the humpback whale (endangered) and the Steller sea lion (threatened). Both of these species are found in adjacent marine waters. Three Forest Service Region 10 Sensitive Species are suspected or known to occur within the area: the trumpeter swan, Peale's peregrine falcon, and the Queen Charlotte goshawk. Trumpeter swans nest in the lowlands on small lakes and along large rivers and winter in ice-free areas throughout the Tongass. Peale's peregrine falcons nest on cliff faces and islands and feed primarily on seabirds. Peale's peregrine falcons pass through the area during their spring and fall migration flights. Inhabitants of late seral forests, Queen Charlotte goshawks are closely associated with productive old growth. In addition, 12 sensitive plant species are known or suspected to occur in the Sitka Ranger District.

(d) Karst, Cave, and Other Geologic Resources: There are no known karst or cave resources in this roadless area. There are a few cirque glaciers and small permanent ice fields along the eastern boundary of the area. These glaciers are the southernmost island glaciers in North America.

(5) Scientific and Educational Values: There are no known features of ecologic, geologic, scientific, or cultural significance. There are no Research Natural Areas in this roadless area. The area is adjacent to the city of Sitka and readily accessible to school-age children.

(6) Scenic Values: The visual character type of this roadless area is classified as Baranof Highland. Terrain in this character type consists of an irregular, rugged asymmetrical chain of landforms 2,000-5,300 feet in elevation with a steep eastern slope and a gentler western slope deeply indented with fiords. Generally, landforms are visually massive, bulky, and stark throughout the character type. Shoreline forms are very rugged with steep-sided fiord country on both east and west coasts. Rugged headwalls, cliffs, and escarpments are common on the west side of the Baranof Highland character type, as a result of exposure to the sea wind and waves. Numerous rocky crests, sharp ridges, horns, aretes, and cirques are found at higher elevations. Snow can be seen all year round on the higher summits with cirque glaciers and small permanent ice fields, especially in the eastern portion of the area.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area in the north central portion of Baranof Island represents the Baranof Highland visual character type well. This area displays a mountain range deeply and repeatedly scalloped by bays and U-shaped valleys. A combination of historic glaciation and erosion from the high level of precipitation has further accentuated the carving of the topography. The mountains of this roadless area form the scenic backdrop to the city of Sitka, and are a feature that attracts both residents and tourists to Sitka.

The area displays natural characteristics when viewed from major and minor water travel routes and when inside the area. Development associated with the community of Sitka dominates the foreground from Sitka Sound. However this roadless area provides a natural background for viewers. The Visual Priority Routes and Use Areas identified by the Forest Plan that are within or adjacent to the area include: Sitka Sound and Starrigaven (Alaska Marine Highway); Sitka Sound (tour ship route); #7576 – Harbor Mountain and FH#11 - Sawmill Creek/Halibut Point (public use roads); Eastern Channel to Silver Bay and Sitka Harbor (small boat routes); Silver Bay, Nakwasina Sound and Sitka Sound (Saltwater Use Areas); Blue Lake (Dispersed Recreation Area); Sitka (Community); Indian River and Gavan Hill (Hiking Trails); and Katlian Bay and Cedar Cove (boat anchorages).

Approximately 37 percent of the roadless area is inventoried Variety Class A (possesses landscape diversity unique for the character type). Approximately 56 percent of this roadless area was inventoried as Visual Variety Class B (possesses landscape characteristics common for the character type) and 7 percent of the area was rated in Variety Class C (possesses a low degree of landscape diversity).

The majority of this roadless area, approximately 85 percent, has an Existing Visual Condition (EVC) I and appears to be untouched by human activity. Approximately 14 percent has an EVC IV, where changes in the landscape are easily noticed by the average person, but it resembles natural patterns. About one percent of the area has an EVC V, where changes to the landscape are obvious to the average visitor and appear to be major disturbances.

(7) Social, Cultural, and Historical Values: This area has a long and varied history of use dating from Tlingit use in prehistoric and historic times to the present use by a variety of Alaska residents and visitors. Sitka was established between 2,000 and 9,000 years ago as a major Tlingit Indian village. Goldschmidt and Haas (1946) identified aboriginal use (including hunting/trapping, berrying, salmon, shellfish, and trolling for halibut or King Salmon) and structures along the shoreline of the area, including camps, smokehouse/cabin sites, and village sites. The Russians settled in Sitka in 1799, made it the headquarters of the Russian American Company, and later the capital of Russian America. After sale of Alaska to the United States, Sitka served as the territorial capital until 1900, when the capital was transferred to Juneau. Although the city of Sitka lies outside the Roadless Area, its inhabitants have used the surrounding roadless lands intensively.

Use of the area since 1900 has been primarily for hunting, fishing, woodcutting, recreation, and occasional temporary occupancies. Remains of structures and other human cultural activity in varying degrees of deterioration can still be found.

Recreational use of the area is primarily for hunting, fishing, and enjoying the scenery. This use is scattered across the area, with the usual concentrations near lakes, streams, and shorelines. Although Outfitter/Guide Use was reported in adjacent areas in 1999, no outfitter/guide use was reported within the boundaries of the roadless area itself. Subsistence use occurs in the area. The Tongass Fish and Wildlife Resource Assessment (ADF&G, 1998) indicated that six of the eight VCUs located in this area are subsistence use areas with a high sensitivity to disturbance. Four of the VCUs in this area were included among the VCUs with highest community use value (ADF&G, 1998).

(8) Manageability as Wilderness and Boundary Conditions/Changes: The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is only partially well defined by topographic features. The north, east, and south boundaries are determined by major watershed divides. The western boundary, however, is a ragged line that follows the boundary of private land and other land ownership, and is also the result of road system and associated activities. This is a poor and difficult boundary to manage. The feasibility of management of this area as wilderness or in an unroaded condition is poor although there is no significant motorized access or other current nonconforming uses. This lower feasibility is due to the heavy influence of the adjacent population center, road system and associated developments, and adjacent land ownership patterns.

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III. Availability for Management as Wilderness (including effects of wilderness designation on adjacent areas)

(1) **Recreation, Including Tourism Potential:** The varied terrain, diverse vegetation, and attractive scenery of this area provide unlimited potential for dispersed recreation. Additional trails or cabins and shelters are possible and could be located so that they are accessible from the Sitka road system or within easy access by boat from Sitka. With the large numbers of visitors to Sitka, use of trails within walking distance of town or the campgrounds would likely be substantial.

In 1996, the Alaska Visitors Association (AVA) proposed the immediate development of hut-to-hut hiking for 25 persons in the Katlian Bay to Rodman Bay corridor and development of all uses in the future (conditional upon road development).

(2) **Subsistence Uses:** The existing patterns of subsistence activities in the area would not be affected by wilderness designation.

(3) **Fish Resources:** No fish habitat improvement projects are planned for the area.

(4) **Wildlife Resources:** No wildlife habitat improvement projects are planned for the area.

(5) **Timber Resources:** There are 13,747 acres mapped as productive old growth in the roadless area. There are also 668 acres mapped as second growth where timber harvest has occurred in the past. Of these acres, 5,650 acres are categorized as tentatively suitable for timber production. Based on the Forest Plan LUDs assigned to this area (and estimated falldown and scheduling reduction factors), 550 acres or less than one percent of this roadless area are estimated to be suitable for timber production. Approximately 152 of the suitable acres are mapped as high-volume old growth; of these acres, none are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. The potential for managing timber in this roadless area is dependent on higher market values.

(6) **Fire, Insects, and Disease:** The area has no significant fire history. Endemic tree diseases common to Southeast Alaska are present in the area. There are no known epidemic disease occurrences.

(7) **Minerals:** The southwestern portion of the area contains a zone of high mineral development potential with veins of valuable metallic or nonmetallic minerals. The central portion of the area contains a large zone of magmatic oxide or sulfide deposit. There are no known current claims. The USGS Mineral Resource Data website (2001) indicates that there are 26 prospects for chromium, copper, gold, silver, lead, tungsten, or nickel in this roadless area.

This area contains 8,618 acres of land identified as a mineral activity tract having a low potential for experiencing mineral exploration and development of locatable minerals (Coldwell, 1990; USDA Forest Service, 1991). In addition, this area contains an estimated 23,757 acres of undiscovered locatable mineral resources (Brew et al., 1990; USDA Forest Service, 1991). All of these acres are considered to have low potential for development.

(8) **Transportation and Utilities:** A proposed state road corridor and a potential power transmission corridor that run through sections of this area were assigned to the Transportation and Utility System LUD in the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. This proposed road corridor was not included in the 1999 Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 1999). Additional roads would be needed to access timber resources in those areas where the Forest Plan allows timber management.

(9) **Water Availability and Use:** There are no developed recreation cabins located within the roadless area and no other facilities exist to create water demand. However, a quarter of the land in this roadless area is allocated to the municipal watershed LUD and is managed on behalf of the city of Sitka. In addition, the Bear Lake hydroelectric power facility is located within the roadless area.

(10) **Areas of Scientific Interest:** There are no known areas of scientific interest in this roadless area.

- (11) **Land Use Authorizations:** Special use permits associated with the municipal watershed and hydropower will continue.
- (12) **Land Status:** All land within the roadless area is part of the National Forest System. Two small areas of encumbered lands within the roadless area are located in the northwest.

IV. Wilderness Evaluation (Need for Wilderness)

(1) Public and Congressional Interest:

- (a) **Interest Expressed by Local Users and Residents:** Most use of the area is associated with recreational boating, hunting and fishing, and viewing wildlife and scenery of the area.
- (b) **Congressional Interest:** In 1989, U.S. House of Representatives Bill HR 987 proposed to designate 23 areas as wilderness on the Tongass National Forest. This bill did not include the Sitka Urban Roadless Area. In 2001, HR 2908 identified the area as a proposed LUD II addition. It also proposed that the areas along the coastline be assigned Wild and Scenic River status. The areas where timber harvest has occurred were identified for protection as Restoration Areas.

(c) **Public Input During Forest Plan Revisions and Appeals:** Parts of this area were specifically addressed in public input received during the Forest Plan revision and appeal. Katlian, Silver Bay, and Nakwasina Sound were included in a list of areas that are strategically important to Sitka for subsistence uses (and most also for recreation) and deserve protection. The Sitka Conservation Society (SCS) noted that all of the VCUs on the Hoonah Sound to Sitka ferry route should be managed for Semi-Primitive (Semi-Remote) Recreation. They also requested that two of the eight VCUs located within the Sitka Urban Roadless Area be managed under a Primitive Recreation LUD. They identified these VCUs along with other nearby areas to be “at the heart of Sitka’s economy and lifestyle”. The AVA proposed the immediate development of hut-to-hut hiking for 25 persons in the Katlian Bay to Rodman Bay corridor and development of all uses in the future (conditional upon road development). Another commenter identified five of the 8 VCUs within the area as areas that should be managed for timber production. One commenter recommended that North Baranof Island, Nakwasina Sound and Passage, and Katlian Bay be managed for a local wood products industry. Timber industry representatives requested that Management Areas (MAs) C46 and C48 be entirely assigned to the Timber Production LUD. They also requested that the portion of MA C40 within the Sitka Urban Roadless Area be assigned to the Timber Production LUD. Other commenters requested that logging not be permitted in MAs C40 and C46.

The appeal filed by the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) expressed concern that while the immediate shoreline and parts of the uplands of Nakwasina Sound (VCUs 299 and 301) are protected, “most of the uplands are still open to intensive development”. The SEACC appeal also identified one of the VCUs in the area (VCU 324) as part of the Sitka Local Use Area and objected to parts of this area still being “open to clearcutting.” Parts of the area were also specifically identified in the Forest Plan appeal filed by the SCS, which, among other things, objected to inclusion of a number of places in the Sitka area in the “timber base.” These places included an area they identified as Nakwasina, which likely includes part of the Sitka Urban Roadless Area. The SCS also requested that the Baranof coastal tidal river system, which also includes part of the Sitka Urban Roadless Area, be given Wild and Scenic River designation because it is a rare resource that would be more valuable over time than logging the same area would be.

The appeal filed by the Hoonah Indian Association et al., requested that logging not be permitted along the “stretch of lands and islands on both sides of the various narrows that span from Sitka Sound to Hoonah Sound” because the subsistence harvest of deer in this area “already exceeds the sustainable hunting level by a wide margin” and logging would exacerbate this situation.

(d) **Public Input During Roadless Area Conservation Rule and Road Management Policy Review:** This area was not specifically identified in the comments received on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule or Road Management Policy Review. However, some commenters wanted all unroaded lands in the Tongass to be protected from development.

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(e) Public Input Expressed for Project-level EISs and Other Input: This area is not within the study area of any recently completed project-level EISs.

(f) Public Input Expressed During Supplemental EIS Process: SEACC included this area in a contiguous complex of roadless areas consisting of Roadless Areas 330, 331, 332, and 333. They recommend this complex for permanent protection as LUD II. The combined area represents just over 500,000 acres. The Alaska Rainforest Campaign (a coalition of national and Alaska conservation groups) identified Roadless Areas 330, 331, 332, and 333 as a contiguous complex of roadless areas that should be considered one roadless area and recommended it for permanent protection as LUD II.

Some members of the Southeast Alaska Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council identified the need for further protection of this area because of its importance for subsistence

(2) Nearby Roadless and Wilderness Areas and Uses: There are three existing wilderness areas located in proximity to the Sitka Urban Roadless Area. The South Baranof Wilderness borders the area to the south. The West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness lies approximately 14 miles northwest of the area. The Admiralty Island National Monument-Kootznoowoo Wilderness lies approximately 15 miles east.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is part of a larger roadless land area that stretches the length of Baranof Island. This area consists of four roadless areas and the South Baranof Wilderness. The four roadless areas that comprise this larger area are North Baranof (#330), Sitka Urban (#331), Redoubt (#333), and Port Alexander (#334).

(3) Distance From Population Centers (Accessibility): Approximate distances from population centers are as follows:

Community	Air Miles	Water Miles
Juneau (Pop. 30,711)	80	160
Sitka (Pop. 8,835)	1	1
Hoonah (Pop. 860)	60	140
Angoon (Pop. 572)	30	80

The nearest stop on the Alaska Marine Highway is Sitka.

(4) Relative Contribution to the National Wilderness Preservation System: The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is located on the west side of Baranof Island, just north of the center of the island. Sitka and Nakwasina Sounds generally border the area to the west. The roadless area is, however, for the most part separated from saltwater by private lands that are part of the Sitka developed area and extend along the shoreline. The Redoubt Roadless Area (#333) and South Baranof Wilderness border the area to the south. The North Baranof Roadless Area (#330) borders the area to the north and east. The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is generally characterized by an irregular, rugged chain of mountains 2,000 to 5,300 feet in elevation. Numerous rocky crests and sharp ridges are found at higher elevations. Snow can be seen all year round on higher summits with a few cirque glaciers and small permanent ice fields along the eastern boundary of the area. Small mountain lakes are plentiful.

The area is natural appearing and provides a backdrop for the urban area of Sitka. The area has high natural integrity and moderate to high apparent naturalness. There is a high opportunity for solitude and a very high opportunity for primitive recreation within the area.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area has moderate to high scenic quality; approximately 37 percent of the landscape is considered distinctive from a scenery standpoint. In addition to providing a scenic backdrop for Sitka, the area includes some small cirque glaciers and permanent icefields.

The roadless area includes about 3,360 acres of high-volume, old-growth forest. Of these acres, approximately 42 are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area is classified as being in the West Baranof Island Biogeographic Province and makes up about 14 percent of the province. It is one of eight inventoried roadless areas found within the province that make up about 62 percent of the province. The majority of the South Baranof Wilderness is also within this province and makes up approximately 29 percent of the province.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area lies completely within the Baranof-Chichagof Fjordlands Ecological Section. This portion represents 5 percent of the entire ecological section, which is well represented in existing wilderness (28 percent) and other non-development LUDs (35 percent) with an additional 13 percent in LUD II.

The majority of this roadless area (87 percent) is located in the Central Baranof Metasediments Ecological Subsection. This portion of the roadless area represents 28 percent of the entire ecological subsection, which has approximately 20 percent existing wilderness and is well represented by other non-development LUDs (64 percent). The Sitka Sound Complex Ecological Subsection represents 13 percent of this roadless area. This portion of the roadless area represents 8 percent of the entire ecological subsection, which is well represented by non-development LUDs (67 percent), but not by wilderness or LUD II. The Necker Bay Granitics represents less than 1 percent of the Sitka Urban Roadless Area. This portion of the roadless area represents 0.3 percent of the entire ecological subsection, which is well represented by existing wilderness (83 percent) with an additional 16 percent in other non-development LUDs.

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area was rated 20 out of a possible 28 points under the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS). As such, its rating is ranked 53rd from the highest (along with 16 other roadless areas) among the 109 Tongass inventoried roadless areas.

There is both local and national support for managing this area in an unroaded condition, and little support for designation as wilderness. Designation of the area would add Congressional protection to 8 percent of the Sitka Sound Complex Ecological Subsection; this subsection does not contain any areas under long-term Congressional protection. Designation would create a large wilderness heavily influenced by the proximity of Sitka. Overall, the factors identified here indicate that the relative contribution to the National Wilderness Preservation System would be moderate.

V. Environmental Consequences

The Sitka Urban Roadless Area would be managed under the existing Forest Plan if Alternative 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 7 is implemented. Approximately 81 percent of the roadless area would be managed under non-development LUDs. Timber harvest and road development could occur within the remaining 19 percent of the roadless area. The land in the development LUDs includes an estimated 550 acres that are suitable for timber production (1 percent of the suitable acres on the Sitka Ranger District). None of the suitable acres are classified as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. This area contains 8,618 acres of land identified as a mineral activity tract having a low potential for experiencing mineral exploration and development of locatable minerals. In addition, this area contains approximately 23,757 acres of undiscovered locatable mineral resources. All of these acres are considered to have low potential for development. The relatively high recreation use and special use permits would continue. There is a potential road and powerline corridor that crosses the island from Sitka and goes through the roadless area. Planning for the corridor is not active at this time. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area could be affected by ongoing developments in adjacent areas and in the few areas where the Forest Plan allows developments for timber management. The high scenic values of the roadless area are protected by the Forest Plan.

Under Alternative 6, the entire roadless area would be converted to Recommended LUD II. Mineral prospecting and recreation use and developments could continue, but no timber harvest would be allowed. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area, including the high scenic values, would be provided long-term protection if designated LUD II. Designation of the area would add Congressional protection to 8 percent of the Sitka Sound Complex Ecological Subsection, which is not represented by any areas under long-term Congressional protection.

With Alternative 8, the entire roadless area would be converted to Recommended Wilderness. Timber harvest would not be allowed and the potential for other development, including recreation and mineral, could be significantly restricted. Mineral prospecting would be allowed up to the time that the area is actually designated as wilderness by Congress. The

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values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area, including the high scenic values, would be provided long-term protection if designated wilderness. Designation of the area would add Congressional protection to 8 percent of the Sitka Sound Complex Ecological Subsection, which does not contain any areas under long-term Congressional protection.

Land Use Designation Allocations and Suitable Timber Lands by Alternative for Roadless Area 331 (in acres)								
Land Use Designation	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Alt 6	Alt 7	Alt 8
Recommended Wilderness								114,460
Wilderness								
Recommended Wilderness Nat. Mon.								
Wilderness National Monument								
Non-wilderness National Monument								
Research Natural Area								
Special Interest Area								
Remote Recreation	3,117	3,117	3,117	3,117	3,117		3,117	
Enacted Municipal Watershed	28,625	28,625	28,625	28,625	28,625		28,625	
Old-growth Habitat	2,435	2,435	2,435	2,435	2,435		2,435	
Semi-remote Recreation	59,421	59,421	59,421	59,421	59,421		59,421	
Recommended LUD II						114,460		
LUD II								
Wild, Scenic, Recreational River								
Experimental Forest								
Scenic Viewshed								
Modified Landscape	3,001	3,001	3,001	3,001	3,001		3,001	
Timber production	17,862	17,862	17,862	17,862	17,862		17,862	
TOTAL	114,460	114,460	114,460	114,460	114,460	114,460	114,460	114,460
Suitable Timber Lands	550	550	550	550	550	0	550	0