

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Joe Meade,
Forest Supervisor,
Chugach National Forest
U.S. Forest Service
3301 C Street, Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Mr. Meade:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is preparing an environmental assessment (EA), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), regarding the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) to determine whether significant environmental impacts could result from narrowing and refining the EVOS restoration activities and to evaluate the applicability of the 1994 Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), which reviewed the 1994 EVOS Restoration Plan, to current and future Trustee Council actions. This current review is in accord with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) requirements at 40 CFR 1502.9 (c).

We are requesting participation of your agency as a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EA, due to your agency's trusteeship of certain natural resources injured as a result of EVOS.

We look forward to your response to this request. Responsibilities of the lead agency (NOAA) and your agency have been outlined below. If you choose not to participate in this process as a cooperating agency, please inform me immediately.

LEAD AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Assume primary responsibility for meeting the requirements of NEPA including the preparation of the draft and final EA. In this capacity, the lead agency will ensure that the EA includes information needed to address state and federal compliance requirements.
2. Consult with your agency regarding issues of concern, range of EA alternatives, and mitigation measures to be analyzed in the EA.
3. Provide your agency with copies of the preliminary draft(s) of the EA and interim work products, such as individual EA sections or maps, in a timely manner.
4. Provide a minimum of fifteen working days (unless a different, agreed upon time frame is established) for review of the preliminary and final drafts of the EA.
5. Revise drafts of the EA in response to comments/concerns/issues identified by your agency.

6. Ensure that your agency receives copies of all comments received on the EA during the public comment periods and provide an initial identification of those comments pertaining to your agency's expertise or regulatory authority, which may require your agency to prepare a written response for inclusion in the EA.
7. Ensure that the EA identifies your agency as a cooperating agency.

COOPERATING AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Participate in the development of the EA.
2. Provide expertise relating to the natural resources injured by EVOS under your agency's trusteeship.
3. Review preliminary documents and provide comments to the lead agency in accordance with specified timelines.
4. Manage and be responsible for your own resources, such as people, time, and money to assist the lead agency in the development of the EA.
5. Provide the lead agency with timely identification of significant issues, range of EA alternatives, and mitigation measures for the lead agency to consider for inclusion in the EA related to your agency's responsibilities and authorities.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at 206.526.4564 or by email at Craig.R.O'Connor@noaa.gov, comments can also be sent to Laurel.Jennings@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

Craig R. O'Connor
Special Counsel, NOAA