Tongass Energy Program
September 2010
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New projects:

- 14 hydro projects with FERC preliminary permits or awaiting FERC jurisdictional determinations
- 3 non-FERC hydro projects
- 3 hydro projects, licensed but not constructed
- 3 tidal projects
- 3 geothermal projects
Existing projects

- 25 + operating hydroelectric projects on NFS lands or on State or private land adjacent to the Tongass

- Forest Service involvement continues throughout the life of many of these projects – implementation/monitoring of terms and conditions, coordination meetings.
Hydroelectric programs on other NFs are focused on re-licensing and project modifications.

Tongass program is focused on new projects.

We really are different in Alaska.
Due, in part, to expanding workload and profusion of new projects, the Forest Service established a full-time Energy Coordinator position.

Duties:
-- regional energy planning issues
-- project review, FS filings with FERC
Forest Service National Policy:

- To encourage hydropower production where it is compatible with National Forest purposes and ensure that the planning, construction, and operation of hydropower projects protect and effectively utilize National Forest System lands and resources.
Energy Program Goals

1. Timely, professional, and consistent communications with FERC and with project applicants

2. Improved working relationships with project proponents

3. Define the role of the Forest Service in energy planning in SE Alaska

4. Plan and implement TNF energy strategy and participate in regional planning efforts.
The NEPA process consists of an evaluation of the environmental effects of a federal undertaking including its alternatives.

3 levels of analysis:
- Categorical Exclusion (CE)
- Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
Categorical Exclusion

- An undertaking may be categorically excluded from detailed analysis if it meets certain criteria that have been predetermined to have no significant environmental impact.

  - Decision to issue investigative studies permit for a proposed hydro project
  
  - Decision to issue a planning permit for a proposed transmission line

  - 3–5 pages and 3 months (if all goes well)
Environmental Assessment

- EA is prepared to determine if undertaking would significantly affect the environment. If no, a finding of no significant impact is prepared. (FONSI)

- FS might prepare EAs for:
  - small non-FERC hydro project
  - transmission line along a road right-of-way
  - 15 to 45 pages and 9 to 12 months (if all goes well)
Environmental Impact Statement

- a more detailed evaluation of the proposed action and alternatives
- significant impacts, controversial

- Swan–Tyee Intertie (1997)
- Thayer Creek (Angoon Hydro)

- 2 years if all goes smoothly
FERC is responsible for compliance with NEPA

- The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is responsible for NEPA on the decision to license, amend a license, or exempt from licensing a hydropower project.

- The FS does not conduct NEPA on a FERC project.

- The FS will issue a separate decision document for issuance of the special use authorization for construction, operation, and maintenance of the project.