

The Central Tongass project area includes, but is not limited to, lands on Mitkof, Kupreanof, Kuiu, Wrangell, Zarembo and Etolin islands and the Alaska mainland (see [Figure 1](#), Project Area map). Activities are proposed on National Forest System land but may also include other lands, as authorized by the land owners, to facilitate integrated and economical projects. Only invasive plant treatment activities will be considered in Wilderness areas.

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CENTRAL TONGASS SCOPING REPORT – AUGUST 2018 – PAGE 1



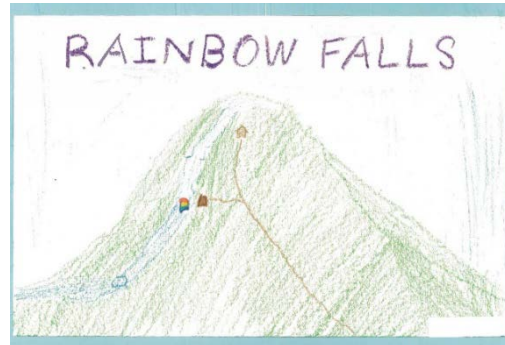
## Who is the Responsible Official?

The Responsible Official for the Central Tongass Project decision is M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest.

## Where is the Central Tongass Project at in the planning process?

Beginning early this year, the project planning team asked you for input to help identify activities within the project area that are important to you. For a summary of ideas submitted see the [Project Update – April 2018](#)<sup>1</sup> letter and [spreadsheet](#)<sup>2</sup> cataloging your input.

The Forest Service anticipates the publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register in mid- to late-August 2018. The publication will initiate a scoping period to provide the public an opportunity to guide the development of the environmental impact statement. During the 45-day scoping period, the Forest Service is seeking information, comments, and assistance from you - Tribal governments; Federal, State, and local agencies; and individuals and organizations interested in or affected by the proposed activities. Prior to the release of the draft environmental impact statement, expected in April 2019, there will be several public involvement opportunities within project area communities, including public meetings, and information posted in public places and in local publications such as the *Petersburg Pilot* and *Wrangell Sentinel* throughout the planning process. Project information and updates, meeting notices, and documents will be provided on the project webpage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/projects/?cid=fseprd568085>. Individuals may also provide comments and sign up for an electronic mailing list at that site.



## How do I comment during the scoping period?

Comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate concerns and contentions to help the Central Tongass planning team prepare a sound environmental impact statement. Helpful items to include in comments about the Proposed Action include: specific resource issues to consider, important places within the project area, and suggestions to improve or change the project.

Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received within 45 days of publication date in the Federal Register. The publication date of this Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this scoping opportunity. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day (11:59 p.m.). The draft environmental impact statement is expected April of 2019 and the final environmental impact statement is expected May of 2020.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd576529.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd576529.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd576528.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd576528.pdf)

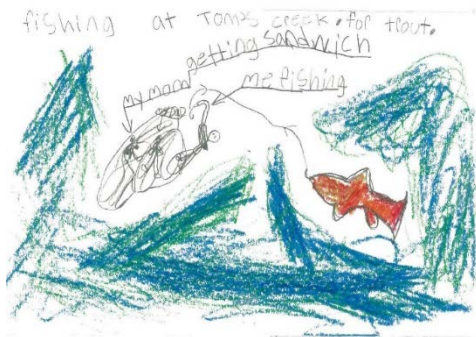


Written comments for the Responsible Official may be submitted to Project Leader Carey Case, P.O. Box 1328, Petersburg, AK 99833; at the Petersburg District Office, at 12 North Nordic, Petersburg, during normal business hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; by FAX at 907-772-5995; or submitted electronically at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=53098>.

Comments received in response to the NOI solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not gain standing to object as defined in 36 CFR § 218.2.

## Why is the Forest Service Proposing the Central Tongass Project? What is the Purpose and Need for Action?

This action is needed to meet Forest Plan goals and objectives, and to support local and regional economies. The needs for this project have been identified by comparing the existing conditions within the project area with the desired conditions (desired long-term landscape attributes) defined in the Tongass Forest Plan (Chapter 2). Where desired conditions are not being met, a need exists. For this project, four categories of needs were identified.



### Watershed Restoration and Improvement

*A need exists to maintain or restore the natural range of habitat conditions in the project area to support viable wildlife, fish and plant populations for subsistence, traditional and cultural uses, and to sustain diversity. In some watersheds this need includes riparian ecosystem function improvements or enhancements, water quality maintenance and protection, fish habitat improvements, and native plant population protection.*

### Vegetation Management

*A need exists for National Forest System lands to consistently provide forest products, such as saw timber, to support Southeast Alaska communities. By providing forest products in a consistent manner, the Forest Service can better support local employment, increase revenue returns, and maintain flexibility and stability in the timber sale program. A need also exists for young-growth forest management to sustain productive timber stands for future use, and to improve habitat for wildlife and fish.*

### Access Management

*A long-term need exists to design, construct, maintain and manage a cost-effective transportation system that supports management activities and provides Forest users access to subsistence, recreation and traditional use opportunities.*

### Sustainable Recreation Management

*Within the project area, a need exists to 1) maintain existing recreation sites and facilities to provide for the health and safety of all users, 2) construct or reconstruct facilities in locations where the need for the*



*facilities are supported by either known use, partnerships for long-term maintenance, or repeated safety concerns, or 3) remove facilities that are no longer needed or are not affordable (Forest Plan, p. 2-4).*

The **purpose** of the CT Project is to meet the identified **needs** to attain Forest Plan goals and objectives, and land use designation (LUD) goals, objectives and desired conditions using an integrated land management approach. Forest-wide goals and objectives this project aims to address include, but are not limited to, Local and Regional Economies, Biodiversity, Timber, Wildlife, Transportation, Fish, Recreation and Tourism, and Young Growth Direction (Forest Plan, pp. 2-2 to 2-6, 5-2 to 5-3, 5-6, 5-8, 5-13 and 5-14).

## What is the Proposed Action for the Central Tongass Project?

The Proposed Action is a variety of management activities aimed at improving forest ecosystem health, supporting community resilience through economic development opportunities within Southeast Alaska communities, providing sustainable recreation opportunities to local visitors and the tourism industry, and offering a variety of wood products to regional mills and local communities. It seeks to address the broader needs identified within the Purpose and Need, balance commercial and non-commercial opportunities, and provide and maintain high-quality experiences for all Forest users over the long-term while maintaining or improving land and resource conditions by considering best-available science and public input.



A guide will be developed to ensure the future implementation of site-specific activities is consistent with the CT Project environmental analysis. Conditions such as stand age, use levels, and proximity to sensitive habitat, will be evaluated before implementation. If the effects of implementing a specific activity are expected to be outside the range of effects disclosed in the environmental analysis, the activity will not be implemented as part of the CT Project.

Individual activity cards will define each activity and guide its implementation over the life of the project. Information provided on the cards will include objectives and methods of implementation, resource-specific guidelines, activity design features, conditions that trigger implementation, and integration opportunities to maximize shared resources between program areas.

Management activities are briefly described below within the four categories of project needs. Included are the maximum treatments considered for the Proposed Action. More detail about the management activities is provided in the Draft Activity Cards on the [CT Project webpage](#).

### Watershed Restoration and Improvement

Watershed restoration and improvement activities on all lands within the project area include: stream and floodplain restoration, fish habitat improvements, and invasive plant management.

To restore proper stream and floodplain functioning conditions, the Forest Service proposes instream wood placement on up to 700 acres (approximately 13 miles of stream) using heavy equipment and/or a helicopter, and instream wood placement on up to 1,720 acres (approximately 54 miles of stream) using hand tools.





To sustain the diversity and production of fish and other freshwater organisms, the Forest Service proposes fisheries improvements such as pool habitat creation, fish pass construction, natural instream barrier modifications, stocking and lake fertilization on up to 15 sites that collectively include no more than 25 miles of stream and 2 lakes.

To treat invasive plant infestations on NFS and neighboring lands, the Forest Service proposes to use an integrated pest management strategy. Treatments proposed include manual methods such as hand-



pulling or tarping; mechanical methods such as mowing or torching; and herbicide application including wicking/wiping, stem injection, foliar spot spray or broadcast spray. Proposed herbicides include aminopyralid or aquatic-approved glyphosate and imazapyr. When deciding whether or not to treat an invasive plant, the Forest Service will consider the following factors: the target species' Alaska Natural Heritage Program invasiveness ranking, the location of the target species, its pathway of spread, and the management objective for the infestation. If the Forest Service decides to treat, the most cost-efficient and effective treatment method will be selected. Herbicide treatment areas may include terrestrial and emergent (plants rooted in water with foliage above the water surface) vegetation. Subsurface aquatic plant treatment is not proposed. To provide the flexibility to treat new infestations, the Proposed Action also includes a management strategy called early detection-rapid response.

## Vegetation Management

Vegetation management activities include: Old-growth and young-growth commercial harvest, and silvicultural intermediate treatments to achieve various management objectives such as promoting timber production, improving wildlife habitat, or improving riparian area health. Old-growth and young-growth activities are proposed in 10 timber analysis areas (TAAs) within the project area and are located on Mitkof, Kupreanof, Kuiu, Wrangell, Zarembo and Etolin islands, and at Thomas Bay and Frosty Bay on the U.S. mainland (see [Figure 2](#), the CT Vegetation Management map). These analysis areas have developed road systems and encompass the majority of the suitable lands for timber harvest, as defined under the Forest Plan. Consequently, TAAs are a primary factor in determining where to plan timber harvest for this project.

There are approximately 1.2 million acres of productive old-growth within the CT project area. Of these, roughly 81,277 acres are mapped as suitable old-growth for timber production. Approximately 78,575 acres occur within 1 of the 10 TAAs. The Forest Service proposes commercial harvest on up to 9,500 acres (approximately 150 million board feet [MMBF]; volume measurement) of old-growth timber, focusing during the first 5-year period on the Mitkof Island, Zarembo Island, Thomas Bay and Northern Kupreanof Island areas.

Approximately 72,151 acres of suitable young-growth occur within the 10 TAAs. Of this, roughly 25,734 acres will reach an age (60 years) where productive stands may be commercially viable to harvest during the life of this project. The Forest Service proposes commercial harvest on up to 4,000 acres



(approximately 80 MMBF) of young-growth timber from stands on suitable lands within the project's 15-year timeframe.

Timber harvest methods include even-aged and two-aged management prescriptions (conventional ground-based logging methods), and uneven-aged management prescriptions (conventional and helicopter yarding). Commercial harvest of old-growth and young-growth timber includes large, small, micro and salvage sale opportunities.

Of the 150 MMBF of commercial old-growth timber proposed for harvest, approximately 20 MMBF of harvest from suitable timber lands is proposed annually, on average, during the first 5 years of implementation (years 2020 through 2024). An average of 7 MMBF of annual old-growth timber harvest during the next 5-year period (years 2025 through 2029), and 4 MMBF on average from 2030 to 2034.

The harvest of young-growth would average 2 MMBF annually over the first 5-year period beginning in year 2020 and increase to an average of 4 MMBF the second period (2025 through 2029). By the last 5-year period (2030 through 2034) young-growth harvest would advance to a yearly average of 10 MMBF. Young growth harvest would occur in stands that generally have not reached 95 percent of culmination of mean annual increment. However, stands proposed for rotational harvest (even-aged and two-aged management) will have generally reached a level of growth where at least 50 percent of the total volume occurs in trees with a merchantable height suitable to produce two 36-foot logs.

Other young-growth management activities to achieve various management objectives, such as promoting timber production, altering wildlife habitats and patterns of use, or improving riparian areas, would treat up to 3,000 acres of young-growth stands annually, or 45,000 acres total over the next 15 years. Activities would include various combinations of the following in young-growth stands approaching, have reached, or are in the stem-exclusion stage of stand development: pre-commercial thinning; creating or maintaining wildlife gaps or clumps; creating or maintaining wildlife movement corridors; creating wildlife trees; girdling; pruning; or slash treatment.

### Access Management

Access management activities include 1) new NFS road construction, 2) NFS road reconstruction, 3) temporary road construction, 4) aquatic organism passage and fish habitat connectivity, and 5) construction, reconstruction, decommissioning and maintenance of marine access facilities, such as log transfer facilities, docks, mooring buoys, boat ramps and boat launches. Road storage and decommissioning are [Supporting Actions](#) and are described below.



The Proposed Action includes approximately 24 miles of NFS road construction, 63 miles of NFS road reconstruction, and 88 miles of temporary road construction for timber harvest, and other resource management activities. These access improvements include up to 33 new stream crossing structures, such as culverts and bridges.

To improve aquatic organism passage and fish habitat connectivity, the Proposed Action proposes replacing, removing, or improving up to 150 stream crossing structures where fish passage is inhibited

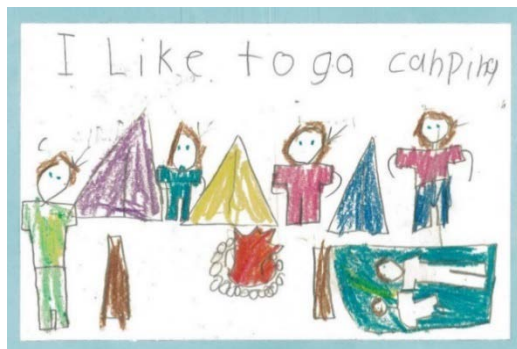
(“red pipes”). Heavy equipment, hand tools or explosives would be used to allow for fish and aquatic organism passage at all flows, and provide effective flood resiliency.

To facilitate log transfer for commercial timber harvest within the CT project area, the Forest Service proposes to maintain or improve 14 existing marine access facilities (MAF), and construct up to 4 MAF sites. Additionally, up to 69 marine access facility sites, such as docks, boat ramps and floats, may be maintained, constructed or improved for public access. These sites are typically not associated with a road system, but used for access to shoreline or inland water facilities such as a cabin, shelter, or trailhead.

### Sustainable Recreation Management

Proposed recreation activities on NFS and neighboring lands include maintenance and improvements of existing recreation facilities, construction of new recreation facilities, and decommissioning existing recreation facilities. Recreation facilities include cabins, shelters, picnic areas, campgrounds, dispersed camping sites, outhouses, viewing areas and platforms.

Trail construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, and maintenance is also proposed and includes



pedestrian trails, motorized trails, snow trails, canoe and kayak portages and the conversion of existing boardwalk trail to gravel.

The Proposed Action includes constructing up to 6 new cabins, 30 day use/picnic areas, 6 platforms for interpretative or wildlife viewing use, and 10 dispersed camp sites (including tent platforms); decommissioning up to 15 cabins; constructing up to 10 new shelters and/or converting cabins to shelters; and constructing or replacing

up to 75 outhouses. The Proposed Action includes construction of up to 300 miles of pedestrian trail (this includes new construction, and/or converting existing boardwalk trail to gravel trail), 60 miles of new motorized trails and 105 miles of winter trails.

Recreation management activities, including trail building, will be prioritized during implementation based on the following conditions 1) health and safety concerns for recreation users, 2) availability of internal or external funding sources, 3) current and projected use levels, degraded resource conditions from human use such as vegetation trampling, site hardening, soil erosion, and 4) feasibility due to topography.

### Supporting Actions

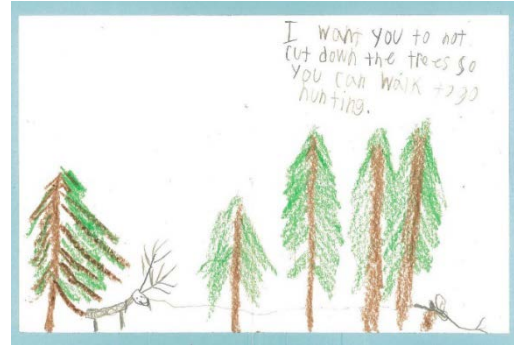
Supporting Actions are contingent upon the implementation of a proposed management activity and are a component of its implementation. For example, the Supporting Action *sign installation* may accompany NFS Road Construction (Activity 09), Trail Construction (Activity 05) or Recreation Facility Construction (Activity 06). Additionally, the Supporting Action *quarry development* could occur in support of NFS Road Construction (Activity 09), NFS Road Reconstruction (Activity 10) or Temporary Road Construction (Activity 11). The activity cards identify which Supporting Actions are associated with the management activity and will be analyzed and possibly implemented as part of that activity.



The Supporting Actions include: cone collection, road storage, road maintenance and reconditioning, road decommissioning, sign installation, quarry development, soil restoration, and timber stand establishment (planting and interplanting). More detail about the Supporting Actions is provided in the Draft Activity Cards on the [CT Project webpage](#).

## Forest Plan Amendment

A project-specific Forest Plan amendment may be proposed to allow the project to proceed in a manner that fulfills the stated Purpose and Need while maintaining consistency with the Plan. The amendment would relax the Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs)<sup>3</sup> (Forest Plan, p. 4-54) on portions of the TAAs on Mitkof, Zarembo and Wrangell islands and Portage Bay located on Kupreanof Island, to improve timber sale economics for the commercial timber sales. If SIOs are relaxed, timber harvest activities may be more noticeable. The amendment would apply only to this project (Figure 3).



If this Forest Plan amendment is included in the Central Tongass Project, the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR § 219.13(b)(2)) requires the Responsible Official to identify which substantive requirements of the Rule are likely to be directly related to a proposed land management plan amendment. At this time, the Responsible Official believes the following requirements of the Rule will apply: 36 CFR § 219.8(b)(2); 36 CFR § 219.10(a)(1); and 36 CFR § 219.10(b)(1)(i).

## Nature of Decision to be Made

Given the Purpose and Need of the project, the Responsible Official will review the no action, the Proposed Action, other alternatives, and the environmental consequences to make decisions that include:

- 1) whether to select the Proposed Action or another alternative;
- 2) mitigation measures and monitoring requirements;
- 3) the range of treatments or activities to be authorized including commercial and pre-commercial timber treatments, restoration activities, invasive plant treatments, habitat improvement, road construction and reconstruction, and recreation development or decommissioning opportunities;
- 4) whether a project-specific Forest Plan amendment related to Scenery Integrity Objectives is necessary; and
- 5) whether there may be a significant restriction of subsistence uses.

<sup>3</sup> As described in the glossary of the Forest Plan (p. 7-53 to 7-54), Scenic Integrity Objectives define a desired level of scenic quality and diversity of natural features based on physical and sociological characteristics of an area. SIOs refer to the degree of acceptable alterations of the characteristic landscape. The adopted SIO is the SIO to be achieved as a result of management direction identified in the approved Forest Plan. There are six levels of SIO: Very High, High, Moderate, Low, Very Low, and Unacceptably Low. Each level is defined in the Forest Plan glossary.





## Permits or Licenses Required

All necessary permits would be obtained prior to project implementation, and may include the following:

- 1) State of Alaska, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES):
  - General permit for Log Transfer Facilities in Alaska;
  - Review Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan;
  - Certification of Compliance with Alaska Water Quality Standards (401 Certification) Chapter 20;
  - Storm Water Discharge Permit/ National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System review (Section 402 of the Clean Water Act);
  - Solid Waste Disposal Permit;
- 2) U.S. Army Corp of Engineers:
  - Approval of discharge of dredged or fill material into the waters of the United States under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act;
  - Approval of the construction of structures or work in navigable waters of the United States under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899;
- 3) State of Alaska, Division of Natural Resources (DNR):
  - Authorization for occupancy and use of tidelands and submerged lands.
- 4) State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
  - Fish Habitat Permit and Concurrence (Title 16)

## What will implementation look like for the Central Tongass Project?

The Central Tongass interdisciplinary planning team (IDT) will develop an implementation guide to accompany the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), making it available for public comment. The guide will provide a framework to ensure implementation of site-specific activities is consistent with the Central Tongass Project environmental analysis and the Responsible Official's decision. A core part of the implementation guide will be continued public involvement through periodic public workshops to guide the implementation process over the life of the project. The implementation guide will include a combination of tools, such as:



- A decision matrix to outline criteria for implementing each activity; and
- Several checklists:
  - **Field checklists** to complete before ground-disturbing activities occur;



- **Annual implementation checklist** to ensure activities do not cumulatively exceed the anticipated effects authorized by the decision;
- **Supporting documentation checklist** for specialists to ensure necessary field surveys have been completed; and
- **Law, regulation and policy checklist** to ensure individual activities are consistent with NEPA and other federal laws and executive orders.

Some goals of the implementation guide will be to:

- verify the effects of implementation are within the scope of the management activities and the range of effects described in the EIS and authorized in the ROD;
- provide a process to keep the public informed of and involved in activity location, timing, and design;
- ensure implementation of activities is responsive to on-the-ground conditions, new scientific information, and public input; and
- foster integrated engagement of interdisciplinary team members, field resource specialists, scientists, line officers, tribes, the public and partners.

An implementation record (a continuation of the project record) will be maintained after the Record of Decision has been signed to include all files and documentation related to implementation.

The implementation guide will potentially include the following steps:

- The Forest Service presents the Central Tongass Project's proposed annual program of work at public workshops within the communities of Kake, Petersburg and Wrangell. The input received at these meetings will guide which proposed activities are included in a preliminary out-year work plan.
- Next, the Central Tongass IDT:
  - Reviews the Activity Cards for the proposed activities' objectives, implementation methods, implementation maximums, possible integration opportunities with other activities, and resource-specific guidelines. The proposed activities are adjusted, as needed.
  - Conducts a NEPA review - checks the FEIS analysis and ROD to ensure the implementation of the proposed site-specific activities are consistent with the environmental analysis and decision.
  - Seeks Responsible Official approval to place proposed projects in the out-year plan. If approved,
    1. the Central Tongass IDT:
      - conducts fieldwork and consultation,
      - completes implementation checklists, and
      - files supporting documentation in the project record.
    2. Responsible Official reviews project proposals for implementation.
    3. Contracting officers prepare contract documents and put projects out for bid.
    4. Project is implemented.



## What's next?

Following this 45-day comment period, the Central Tongass IDT will review comments received in response to the Proposed Action presented in this scoping letter, and the Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register. Alternatives to the Proposed Action will be developed based on any significant issues identified in public comments and from internal Forest Service considerations. A no action alternative, which represents no change and serves as the baseline for the comparison among the action alternatives, will be analyzed as well. The analysis of all the alternatives will be presented for public comment in the Central Tongass draft environmental impact statement, expected April of 2019. The final environmental impact statement is expected May of 2020.

## Stay in touch!

If you have questions about the Central Tongass Project, please contact Petersburg District Ranger David Zimmerman, or Project Leader Carey Case at 907-772-3871.

**Mailing Address:** Petersburg Ranger District  
Central Tongass Project  
PO Box 1328  
Petersburg, AK 99833

**Visit our project website:**

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/projects/?cid=fseprd568085>

**Sign up for project updates via e-mail:**

[https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=NEPA\\_53098\\_S](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?topic_id=NEPA_53098_S)

**Call or come visit your local Forest Service Ranger District office:**

Petersburg Ranger District  
907-772-3871

Wrangell Ranger District  
907-874-2323

Thank you. We look forward to your participation in the planning process.



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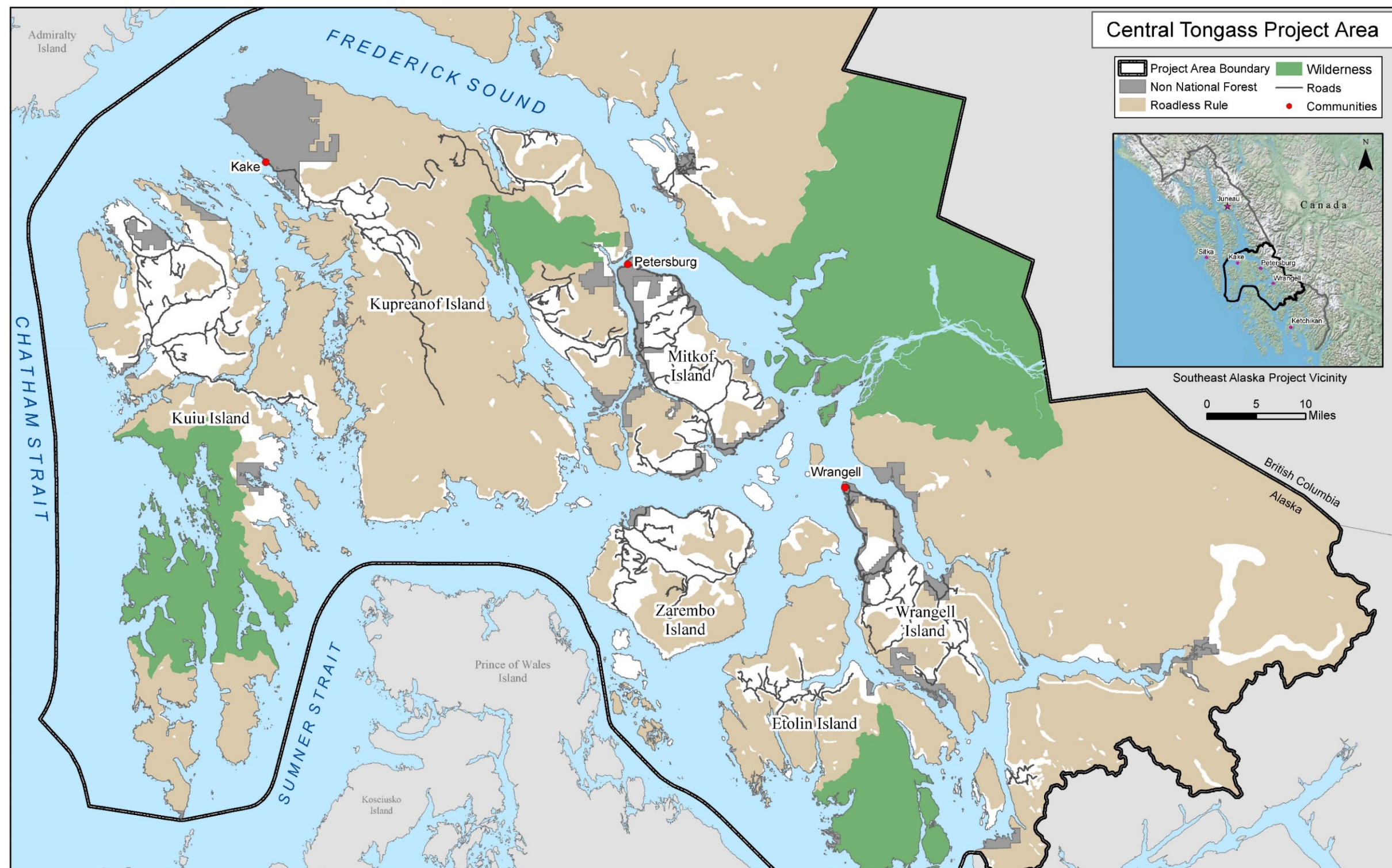


Figure 1. Central Tongass Project Area Map





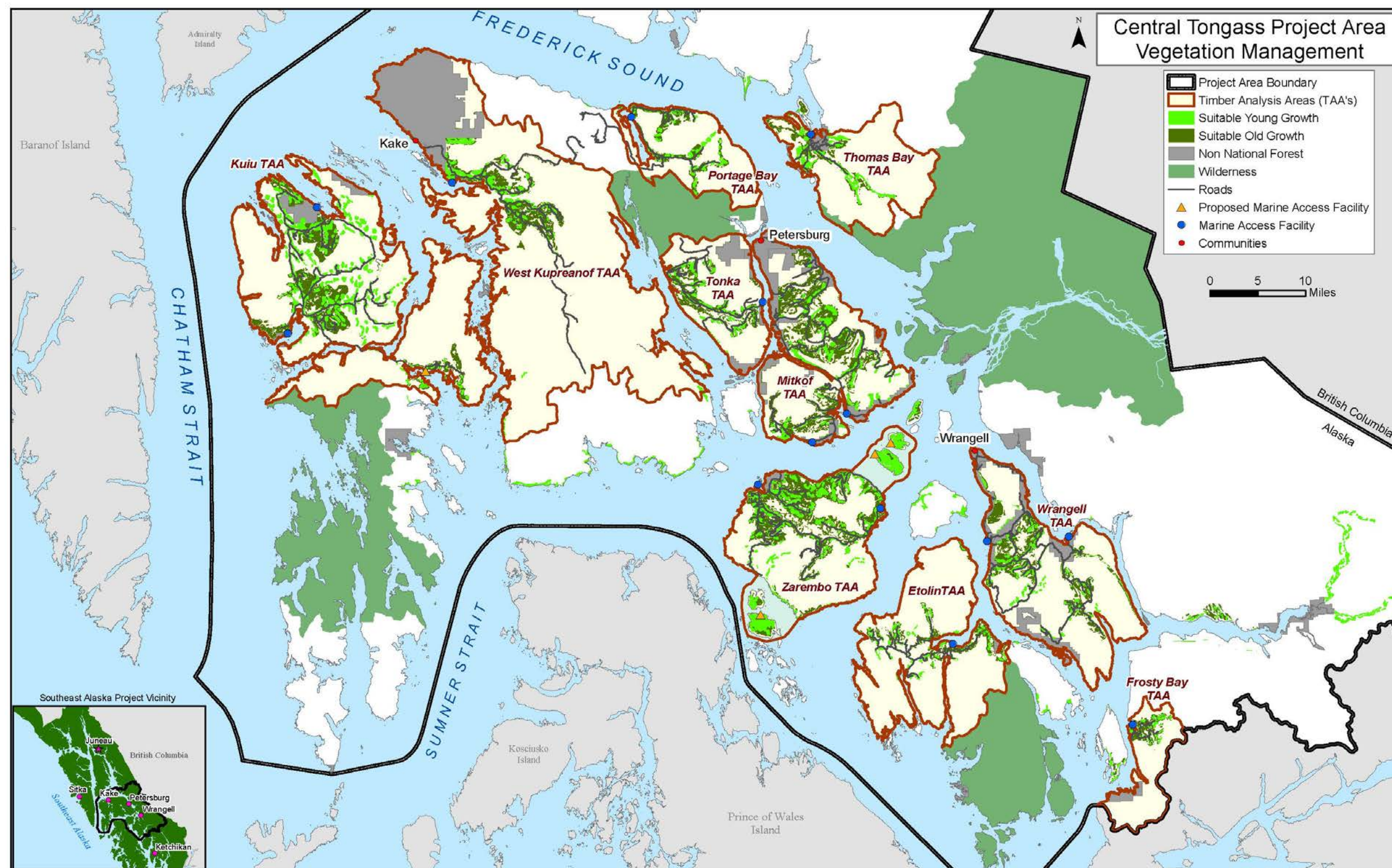


Figure 2. Central Tongass Project Area Vegetation Management Map





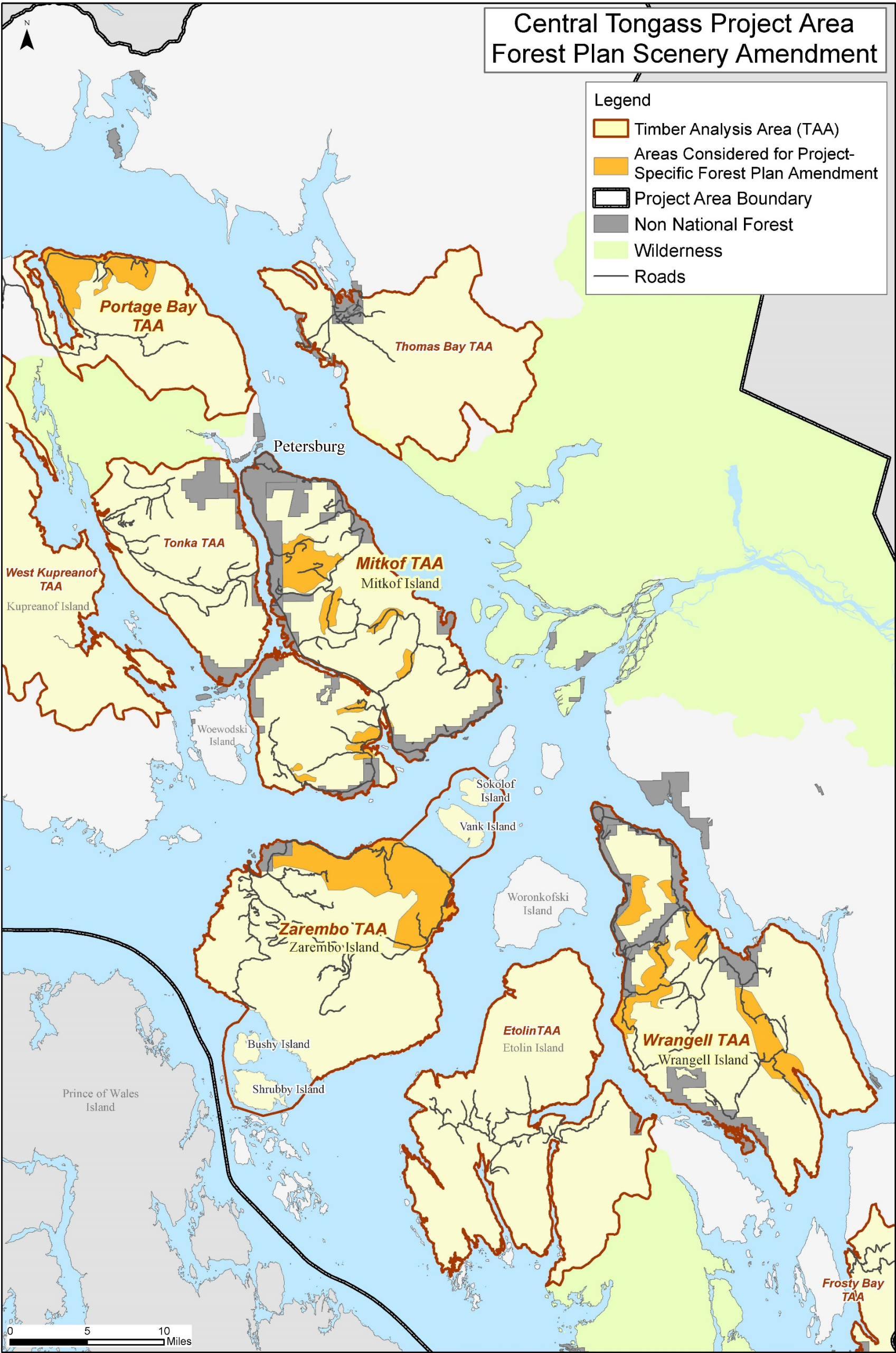


Figure 3. Central Tongass Timber Analysis Areas considered for project-specific Forest Plan scenery amendment