

**2023 Annual Report to the Board of Forestry**

**Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation  
Division of Water**

January 30, 2024



## **I. Overview**

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) appreciates the opportunity to present to the Board of Forestry (Board) its 2023 annual report on the effectiveness of the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA) and application of FRPA regulations pertaining to state water quality objectives.

DEC's roles in application of the FRPA water quality objectives for forest operations are: (1) ensure state water quality standards (18 AAC 70) are met; and (2) ensure projects are not causing "degradation of water quality" as defined in 11 AAC 95.900.

The FRPA and regulations specify and require the proper application of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to meet the FRPA water quality objectives. Determining if the BMPs are implemented, and if they are effective in meeting the water quality objectives, occurs primarily through: (1) state resource agency staff conducting formal compliance monitoring on timber harvest operations, and conducting forest practices field inspections; (2) operators performing routine self-monitoring; and (3) the collection, analysis, and reporting of water quality and fish habitat monitoring data from comprehensive BMP effectiveness projects. Under the authority of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), DEC is involved in similar activities on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands.

As required by the FRPA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Forestry (DOF), Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and DEC were provided Detailed Plans of Operation (DPOs) on all land ownerships. DEC performed summary reviews focused on the forest practices activities that may affect drinking water sources and public health to ensure that those activities comply with the requirements of the Alaska Drinking Water and Water Quality Standards Regulations. DNR-DOF, ADFG-Habitat Division, and DEC Division of Water conducted reviews and inspections which have proven valuable to ensuring that FRPA BMPs are properly implemented and are effective at protecting water quality.

## **II. FRPA Implementation on Private, Municipal, and Trust Lands**

DEC reviewed DPOs as received and reviewed sister agency (DNR, ADFG) inspection comments. DEC did not attend in-person compliance monitoring inspections this year.

## **III. FRPA Implementation on State Lands**

DEC reviewed Forest Land Use Plans, Preliminary Best Interest Findings, FRPA inspection reports and DPOs on state lands as received for potential to affect drinking water sources and public health and provided comments and/or engaged with DNR and ADF&G staff as warranted.

## **IV. FRPA Implementation on Federal Lands**

The USFS continues to make progress on water quality issues by implementing the Tongass National Forest tasks identified in the Alaska Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Strategy (2021), and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the USFS and DEC (1992). The MOU establishes the USFS as the agency responsible for monitoring and protecting water quality on National Forest System lands in Alaska and describes specific DEC and USFS activities to accomplish that policy directive. The USFS has continued to accept input from DEC on improving

its annual program for monitoring the implementation of BMPs and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for the protection of water quality and fish habitat.

The revised Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) commits the USFS to monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of water quality and fish habitat-related BMPs (found in the USFS Region 10 Soil & Water Conservation Handbook and the USFS National Core BMPs) and Standards and Guidelines (specified in TLMP). DEC continues to work with the USFS to ensure implementation and effectiveness of the BMPs and Standards and Guidelines.

## V. Budget and Staffing

**DEC currently provides approximately 0.25 FTE of time to forest practices work.** This position is being funded by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 319 grant funds. DEC generally focuses its reviews on those actions that may affect public health; however, DEC does comment on potential impacts to aquatic life and habitat as warranted. DEC's scope of work related to forest practices is focused on ensuring the implementation of forestry BMPs via timber harvest plan reviews and a limited number of field inspections on state, municipal, federal, and private lands. DEC's continued involvement in Forest Practices centers on the "shall" sections of the Forest Resources & Practices Act. Specifically, the sections shown below.

AS 41.17.041(e), which states *"The division shall serve as staff to the board. The department, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Environmental Conservation shall provide technical staffing and information as needed by the board;"*

AS 41.17.047(c), which states, in part, *"The board, working with the department, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Fish and Game, other affected agencies, and the forest-dependent industries, shall conduct an annual survey of research needs related to forest practices;"* and

AS 41.17.047(d), which states, in part, *"The state forester, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Environmental Conservation shall each present an annual report, independently, to the board on the effectiveness of this chapter, the regulations, and best management practices adopted under this chapter that protect the resources for which they have statutory responsibility, and shall make recommendations for changes to correct procedural or substantial problems."*

Although DEC's involvement in Forest Practices work is limited, DEC continues to support the following tasks.

- Act as water quality experts for questions that arise from the Board, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Fish and Game.
- Participate in the review and inspection of forest practices activities on all land ownerships that may affect drinking water sources and public health to ensure that those activities comply with Alaska Drinking Water and Water Quality Standards Regulations.
- Participate in Board of Forestry meetings and present DEC's annual report to the board on the effectiveness of the Act and Regulations in protecting water quality.
- Participate in the interagency Forest Practices Effectiveness Monitoring work group.

- Participate in the Tongass National Forest annual BMP implementation and effectiveness monitoring as resources allow.

Unless additional funding becomes available, DEC will not review Forest Service NEPA documents, unless specific activities that may impact sources public health are identified.

In calendar year 2023, DEC targeted two facilities but did not conduct inspections as in-water log sorting operations did not occur. These sites are authorized for in-water log sorting and the marine discharge of bark and wood debris associated with in-water log transfer and storage within the project area zone of deposit, in accordance with the conditions set forth in the permit. Sites authorized for in-water sorting of logs are authorized under either the general permit covering sites which received 404 permits prior to October 22, 1985 (AKG700000) or received 404 permits after that date (AKG701000).

## **VI. DEC observations on the effectiveness of the FRPA in protecting water quality**

The three resource agencies have relied primarily upon plan reviews and field inspections to evaluate the success or failure of forestry BMPs. Information and new knowledge from these efforts, and from forest practices effectiveness monitoring projects have, and will continue to, provided the basis for future recommendations on any improvements to the FRPA and its supporting regulations. DEC continues to believe that, when properly implemented, the BMPs of the Forest Practices Regulations are effective at protecting water quality.

DEC did not participate in the Best Management Practices Evaluation with USFS and ADFG in 2023 as USFS-proposed locations did not have direct relationships the protection of drinking water sources or public health.

## **VIII. Tasks and Initiatives for Calendar Year 2024**

In addition to the standard FRPA implementation tasks on state, private, and federal lands, the department expects to complete the following tasks in 2024:

- Continue to work with DOF and the Habitat Division in prioritizing and reviewing BMP effectiveness monitoring.
- Conduct site inspections of LTF sites which are authorized under the general permit for in-water sorting of logs (as possible depending on operational status of the LTFs).
- Accompany other agency staff on FRPA inspections, with specific attention to stormwater/sediment management BMPs in areas that may impact public drinking water sources, public health, or at the request of partner agency staff.