



*Trout Unlimited Alaska*

May 12, 2008

Chief Abigail Kimbell  
USDA Forest Service  
Attn: Appeals  
Yates Building, 3CEN  
201 14<sup>th</sup> St, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090  
Email: [appeals-chief@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-chief@fs.fed.us)

Re: Notice of Appeal

Dear Chief Kimbell:

The following is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 217 on behalf of the Alaska Office of Trout Unlimited, objecting to the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Amended Land and Resource Management Plan of the Tongass National Forest (Forest Plan), signed by Regional Forester Dennis E. Bschor on January 23, 2008.

**Interest of Appellants:**

Trout Unlimited is private, non-profit, non-political conservation organization comprised of over 150,000 members. The mission of Trout Unlimited is to conserve, protect, and restore North America's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds. The Alaska Program of Trout Unlimited, based in Juneau, is focused on carrying out the goals of this mission on the Tongass National Forest and other important fish-producing watersheds throughout Alaska.

**Introduction:**

Although the Amended Tongass Land Management Plan and Record of Decision does provide the basis for a new approach to managing the Forest, the revised Plan fails to protect major fish producing watersheds at levels that will insure their long-term productivity. Trout Unlimited believes the Forest Service failed to sufficiently incorporate the findings of both their own scientists and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) in this regard. Both the Fish Habitat Risk Panel and the Anadromous Fish Habitat Assessment indicate that long-term fish production is best achieved through the conservation of remaining intact, high value watersheds

across the Tongass. Using recommendations from ADFG, the results of The Nature Conservancy's and Audubon's Tongass Conservation Assessment (Schoen, 2007) and the input of local fishermen and fishing groups, Trout Unlimited identified and proposed 23 high-value fish producing watersheds for conservation status (LUD II or Wilderness) as part of our comments on the TLMP EIS (Trout Unlimited, 2007). The Amended Plan and ROD failed to designate any watersheds for conservation status. This omission constitutes the basis for our appeal.

**Supporting Information:**

One example of the shortcomings of the Amended Plan is the situation on central Kupreanof Island. Of the six major intact, fish-producing streams in this area (Castle, Tunehean, Totem, Kushneahin, Irish/Keku Lakes, and Lovelace) three (Castle, Tunehean, and Kushneahin) have been recognized by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) for their significant fisheries values and have received recommendations for conservation status from that department. The other three streams contribute substantial fish assets to commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries in the area. All six watersheds scored in Tier 1 for salmon production in TNC/Audubon's Watershed Matrix Rankings. In spite of this, the Revised TLMP now calls for intensive logging and road-building in five of these watersheds, including the Castle River watershed, which is part of the Central Kupreanof Timber Sale currently out for scoping.

After considerable research and feedback from local users, Trout Unlimited formally proposed congressionally mandated conservation status for all six of these fish producing watersheds as part of our comments on the TLMP Revision. Our rationale for proposing protections for these areas, and 17 others across the Tongass, was based first on their high level of fish production and intact nature, but also on recommendations from the USFS itself (summarized below), which call attention to the negative impacts roads and timber harvest have on fish and their habitat. A Forest Service panel (Dunlap, 1997) convened specifically to assess levels of risk to fish associated with timber harvest associated with the original Tongass Land Management Plan in 1997 concluded:

1. Roads, especially those that cross streams, may have negative effects on fish habitat. The panel identified Prince of Wales, Kupreanof, Kuiu and Chichagof Islands as having road densities currently sufficient to be of concern to maintaining adequate fish habitat.

2. Risk to fish habitat increased as the amount of timber harvest increased.
3. Allocation of reserves free from timber harvest, which include entire watersheds, reduces risks to fish habitat.
4. Watershed Analysis should be conducted prior to management activities (road construction and timber harvest).
5. Protection of the upper portions of watersheds is important to preserving fish habitat throughout entire stream systems.

Another panel, convened by the US Congress (USFS, 1995) to evaluate whether standards and guidelines for timber harvest specified by the Tongass Timber Reform Act adequately protect fish habitat on the Tongass, came to similar conclusions. This panel, comprised mainly of Forest Service biologists and hydrologists, concluded "that current procedures, as implemented, are not entirely effective in protecting fish habitat" and "do not address fish habitat and watershed processes over long time frames and over large landscape scales."

Careful consideration of the Revised Forest Plan suggests that the USFS has chosen largely to ignore its own recommendations. Significant areas containing high-value fish producing watersheds in central Kupreanof are currently slated for increased road construction and timber harvest. Only one of the 6 watersheds noted has been scheduled for watershed-scale protection (Remote Recreation/Old Growth Reserve) and no provisions for watershed analysis have been mandated for the other five. Healthy salmon and trout populations are simply too important to the economic well-being of our region and our quality of life for the Forest Service to neglect them in this fashion.

Our research indicates commercial fishing, guided sport fishing and seafood processing make up at least 20% of the jobs held in Southeast Alaska. Although we recognize the timber industry does and should play a role in our economy, we believe more must be done to focus that industry on harvesting timber off existing roads in previously impacted watersheds and away from important, intact fish production areas.

**Relief requested:**

Trout Unlimited requests that the Chief of the Forest Service direct the formation of another Fish Habitat Risk Panel specifically charged with assessing the impacts to, and long-term viability of salmonids and their habitat across the Tongass which would result should the Amended

TLMP be implemented; to recommend specific actions which should be taken to avoid those impacts; and to identify critical high-value salmon watersheds which should be considered for congressionally-mandated conservation land use designation.

**Conclusion:**

The approach to Tongass Management and Planning has long been focused on timber demand and production and has largely relegated the vitally important goal of insuring species viability and sustainability to chance. The perception of the Agency appears to be, provide timber and hope that fish and wildlife populations withstand the impacts. TU advocates insuring viable, sustainable and harvestable fish and wildlife populations first by conserving critical habitat and then proceeding to determine the viable, sustainable and harvestable quantities of timber which are available. This change in approach is reflective of both current public priorities and economic realities within our region and the nation overall and should have been reflected in the Amended Forest Plan.

Sincerely,

Tim Bristol, Alaska Program Director  
Mark Kaelke, Southeast Alaska/Tongass Project Director

**Sources Cited:**

Dunlap, 1997. 1999. Summary of the 1997 fish habitat risk assessment panel. Appendix 1. General Technical Report PNW-GTR-460. USDA, Forest Service. Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, OR.

Schoen and Albert, 2006. Southeast Alaska and Tongass National Forest Conservation Assessment and Resource Synthesis. Audubon Alaska and Nature Conservancy.

Trout Unlimited, 2007. Trout Unlimited Watershed Conservation Proposal. TLMP EIS comments from Tim Bristol and Mark Kaelke to Forrest Cole.

United States Forest Service, 1995. Report to Congress:  
Anadromous Fish Habitat Assessment. Pacific Northwest  
Research Station. Region 10.