



# NEWS

## TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE

Contact: Dennis Neill  
Phone: 907-228-6201  
Release Date: March 20, 2007

### **Public Comment Period on Amendment of Tongass Forest Plan Extended to April 30**

Ketchikan, March 20 -- Tongass National Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole today announced an extension of the public comment period on the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) and draft amended forest plan that responds to the Ninth Circuit Court decision of August 2005, and the 2005 mid-term review of the plan.

The comment period, originally set to end April 12, has been extended to April 30, 2007 by Regional Forester Denny Bschor. Bschor said he decided to extend the comment period because severe weather throughout Southeast Alaska has forced district rangers to reschedule some of the public meetings/hearings, and has delayed some of the Forest's Tribal consultation efforts.

Forest Supervisor Cole noted that this extension of the comment period will also give everyone additional time to review and comment on the small old growth reserve changes that were posted to the website in mid March. Part of this ongoing effort to update the small old growth reserves was included in the DEIS and the remaining proposed changes are available at [www.tongass-fpadjust.net](http://www.tongass-fpadjust.net). Cole added that, while the 1997 Forest Plan included maps of small old growth reserves, they had not received enough analysis to see how well they met forest plan standards and guidelines.

“Since 1997 we have been reviewing and modifying these small reserves, mostly with non-significant forest plan amendments associated with site specific project decisions. In conjunction with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our ranger districts, we have reviewed the entire set of small old growth reserves. The changes we made have been posted on our website”, Cole said.

“We have worked hard to have an open and transparent process for this amendment of the forest plan. The website, which has been operational since January of 2006, has given people the opportunity to see many of the changes we are now proposing. The website has also made available considerable background information about our findings from the five-year review of the forest plan, new information, and relevant research,” Cole explained. “Public comment is one of the key strengths of our process. I believe the public dialogue we have been having will allow us to chart a future course for the Forest that will provide long-term vitality for the communities of Southeast Alaska and significant conservation of pristine landscapes.”

A set of new alternatives was required by the Ninth Circuit Court’s decision, and are analyzed in detail in the DEIS. Cole stated that he has not selected a “preferred alternative” from among those analyzed. “I want to open the door for the broadest possible opportunities for collaboration,” he noted.

The forest plan website, found at <http://tongass-fpadjust.net>, provides background information, continuous updates on progress, and opportunities for the public to present their views and input to the process. For additional information, visit the web site, or contact Project Coordinator Lee Kramer at (907) 586-8811, extension 225, or email at [lkramer@fs.fed.us](mailto:lkramer@fs.fed.us).