



File Code: 1950-3

Date: January 23, 2008

Dear Planning Participant:

This letter accompanies the Record of Decision (ROD), Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) and Amended Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) which respond to a decision issued by the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

In August 2005, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit issued a decision in *Natural Resources Defense Council, et al., v. United States Forest Service, et al.*, 421 F.3d 797 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2005) that found deficiencies in the process used to develop the 1997 Forest Plan revision. Specifically, the Court found inadequacies related to timber demand, the range of alternatives considered relative to timber demand and potential effects on roadless areas, and cumulative effects from activities conducted on non-National Forest System lands. The Court ordered additional analysis and the development of an environmental impact statement (EIS) to correct these deficiencies. The documents being released today address all of the deficiencies identified by the Court, as well as a number of needs identified by the 5 Year Review of the Forest Plan.

The Tongass' extensive collaboration with many new and existing partners has played a very important role in the development of this Amendment and will continue to be an integral part of the forest management in the future. The Forest worked with State and Federal agencies, Tribal Governments, SE Alaska Communities, organizations and individuals to develop this Amended Forest Plan. One of the most significant partnerships is with the State of Alaska, designated as a Cooperating Agency for this analysis. Governor Sarah Palin and Forest Service Chief Abigail R. Kimbell signed a Preamble to the ROD, which sets the vision for sustainability of the Tongass and for Southeast Alaska's communities in a coordinated effort to improve and promote natural resource management.

Approximately 84,500 comments were received on the Draft EIS. These comments were used to refine the analysis and shape the decision. A summary of comments and Forest Service responses can be found in Appendix H of the Final EIS.

One important element of the Plan that many have been anticipating is the amount of timber the Forest can offer for timber sales over the life of this Plan. The Allowable Sales Quantity, or ASQ, in the Amendment remains unchanged from the 1997 Plan of approximately 267 million board feet a year over the next 10 years. The total suitable land base the Plan outlines for timber harvest is comparable to the 1997 Plan at about 773,000 acres.

What is a significant change in the Amended Plan is how the Forest will plan and offer timber sales. The ROD introduces a new strategy, referred to as the Timber Sale Adaptive Management Strategy, which limits the lands available for timber harvest to that necessary to support



demonstrated levels of demand. While the majority of higher value roadless areas are not available for timber harvest, this strategy will ensure those areas that are available are not impacted until timber demand rises.

The new Timber Sale Adaptive Management Strategy will be implemented in three phases, based upon performance. Under Phase 1 timber harvests will be restricted to roaded and mostly lower value inventoried roadless areas (areas in close proximity to existing roads) until the level of timber harvest reaches 100 million board feet a year for two consecutive years.

Phase 2 restricts harvest to Phase 1 lands and additional moderate value inventoried roadless areas (areas farther from existing roads with multiple-use value for recreation, fish and wildlife use) until the level of timber harvest reaches 150 million board feet a year for two consecutive years. Finally, Phase 3 of the Strategy applies, and includes the remaining suitable land base. A map of these phases is included on the CD and on the website at [www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/).

The ROD, Final EIS and Amended Forest Plan will be published in the Federal Register in early to mid February. The Amended Forest Plan can be implemented 30 days from that date. Publication in the Federal Register also begins a 90 day appeal period. See the ROD for more information.

All of these documents as well as more information about the amendment process can be found at [www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/). Please contact Lee Kramer, the Project Manager at 907-789-6246 for more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Forrest Cole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

FORREST COLE  
Forest Supervisor