



NEWS

TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-FOREST SERVICE

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Amendment of Tongass Forest Plan Launched

JUNEAU, Alaska, March 21 -- Tongass National Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole today outlined the timeline and steps needed to amend the Tongass forest plan in response to the Ninth Circuit Court decision of last August and the 2004 mid-term review of the plan, in an address to the Southeast Conference meeting in Juneau, Alaska. "I want to take this plan from excellent to outstanding, by building on new knowledge to add to the science we used ten years ago," he said. "With these changes, we can do an even better job of providing clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife, and economic stability for future generations."

He also reported that a new timber demand analysis, from the Pacific Northwest Research Station (PNW), would be available to the public later in March. "The demand analysis is a key component of the amendment process, because it's the science that lets us answer one of the Court's findings," Cole noted. "I was able to read it once the independent peer review was completed, and I believe that the scenarios it presents 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."

Cole said that a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was at the Federal Register and would be published later this month. He added that the Forest Service would use the 1982 Planning Rule rather than the 2005 Rule, because the Court's decision calls for an EIS, and because many interested parties had asked that the Plan be amended with the same rules used to develop it.

A set of new alternatives, also a requirement of the Ninth Circuit Court's decision, will be developed by late May, the Supervisor added. "These alternatives will 'tell the story' of the demand scenarios, covering a wide range of possible future economic conditions. These 'alternative stories' will give all of us a chance to carefully consider what might realistically happen in the timber industry and other contributors to Southeast Alaska economies. Then we can plan what role National Forest resources should play, and how to maintain all the other values of those resources that we collectively treasure." Cole added that he wanted to develop a coalition of citizens and interest groups to help the Forest Service create these alternative descriptions as the first step in developing a draft EIS.

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The draft EIS will be published by the end of November 2006, followed by a 90-day public comment period. Unlike many previous planning processes, however, this amendment process has been open to public comment since January, when a new website was opened specifically for this process. The site, found at www.tongass-fpadjust.net, provides background information, continuous updates on progress, and opportunities for the public to present their views and input to the process. The Timber Demand Analysis will be posted on the website when it is available.

The full text of Cole's remarks at Southeast Conference is attached to this news release. It is also available on the Tongass National Forest's web site at www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass.

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.

For additional information on the Timber Demand Analysis, contact Cindy Miner at the Pacific Northwest Research Station at (503) 808-2135, or email clminer@fs.fed.us.

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