



[Click here to return to the original story](#)

Feds to retool timber plan

Study to help decide how much Tongass timber should be available for logging

The Tongass National Forest is getting ready to undertake a major re-evaluation of its forest plan, with a special focus on recalculating the market demand for Tongass timber.

If Tongass logging levels drop further, "we die completely," said Owen Graham, the executive director of the Alaska Forestry Association, a timber industry group based in Ketchikan.

In a ruling last summer, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals required the Forest Service to conduct a major environmental study to fix the timber demand miscalculation and other flaws the judges found with the 1997 forest plan.

"The highest priority for us is to fix" the timber market demand calculations," Kramer said.

Some scientists with the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station - primarily based in Juneau and Sitka - are working on revising the market-demand calculations, which will go out for scientific peer review, Kramer said.

The kickoff of the new forest study - an environmental impact statement (EIS) required by the 9th Circuit - will likely occur by the end of March, said Dennis Neill, a spokesman for the national forest.

The study's proposed alternatives for logging levels will be derived from the Pacific Northwest Research Station's recalculated market demand, Kramer said.

The study also will include a review of the Tongass' conservation strategy, which is considered the focal point of the forest plan.

Environmentalists in Juneau said Monday that one of the most important

variables of the new study is which version of federal rules will be used to conduct it.

The Forest Service has the discretion of choosing older or more recent guidelines for developing national forest plans. That decision hasn't been made yet, Neill said.

The old forest planning rules - used to create the 1997 forest plan - contain an appeals process and detailed public notice requirements.

On the other hand, new forest planning guidelines published in 2005 include changes, such as replacing the traditional appeals process with an objection process that is used by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The new rules are being challenged legally. They decrease public participation, gut the Forest Service's biodiversity standard and the requirement for forests to maintain viable wildlife populations, said Buck Lindekugel, director of conservation for the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council.

"They wipe out any meaningful standard of protection," Lindekugel said. Click here to return to story:

http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/030706/sta_20060307011.shtml