

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service Alaska Region

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Public Affairs
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Regional Forester releases Record of Decision for Tongass Land Management Plan Amendment

Alaska Regional Forester Denny Bschor signed the Record of Decision (ROD) today that approves the 2008 Tongass National Forest Land Management Plan Amendment, and selected Alternative 6 with modifications noted in the ROD for the amended plan. The goals of the Amendment are to sustain the diversity and health of the forest, provide livelihoods and subsistence for its residents and ensure a source of recreation and solitude. The Amendment was completed in response to the Forest's own five-year plan review, and a Ninth Circuit Court decision in 2005.

While the Amendment process is a continuation of many years of planning on the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska, today's decision is the result of a new collaborative approach to managing the nation's largest temperate rainforest.

Bschor thanked the many partners who have worked with the Forest Service in producing what he calls a ground-breaking approach to natural resource management. One of the most significant partnerships is with the State of Alaska, as evidenced by a shared vision statement signed by Governor Sarah Palin and Forest Service Chief Abigail R. Kimbell. The statement establishes a vision for sustainability of the Tongass and Southeast Alaska's communities in a coordinated effort to improve and promote natural resource management.

The Amended Forest Plan contains noteworthy changes to the 1997 Plan, including:

- adding 90,000 acres to old growth reserves;
- maintaining protection for goshawk nests;
- expanding geologic special interest areas to protect 47,000 acres of karst lands most vulnerable to development;
- adding a goal to consult with Native Alaskan Tribes to protect and maintain sacred sites across the forest;
- moving several areas into the semi-remote recreation land category to address public concerns.

One important element of the Plan that many communities, industries and groups have been anticipating is the amount of timber the forest can sell over the life of this Plan. The allowable sale quantity, or ASQ, in the Amendment remains generally unchanged from the 1997 Plan at approximately 267 million board feet a year over the 10 years, with some possible additional opportunities through more intensive management of second growth.

"There may be disappointment that the ASQ hasn't increased or diminished, depending on your viewpoint," said Bschor. "What is significant in the amended plan however, is our commitment to the State of Alaska to provide an economic timber sale program which will allow the current industry to stabilize, and for an integrated timber industry to become established.

That commitment will be formalized through agreements with the State, establishing a framework for us to work together into the future.”

The ROD introduces a range of available land base from which to offer timber that is driven by the quantity of timber an integrated industry will need to provide jobs for local communities in Southeast Alaska, rather than the broader and less predictable demand of a global market place. The innovative adaptive management strategy (AMS) is directly tied to the volume of timber the existing mills in Southeast Alaska need over a given time period, and provides for future support to the growth of an integrated regional timber industry. This integrated industry would have facilities capable of processing the full range of timber, including lower-grade utility logs, which come from most sales on the forest. This concept was endorsed by many parties throughout development of this Amendment.

The AMS first provides for a stable, predictable supply of timber for the current mill operations, being supplied initially from roaded and lower-value roadless areas of the forest. Over time, an emerging integrated industry could be supplied from moderate-value roadless areas or through managed second-growth stands. This approach will enable the many small, family-owned mills to continue to contribute to the economies of their communities and the region. As timber industry integration and growth continue, the land base could be expanded to include some higher-value roadless areas, increased dependence on second growth timber, and some restoration forestry.

“The transition time between providing for the current industry and a future integrated industry provides the Forest Service and stakeholders an opportunity to collaborate on implementation actions,” said Bschor.

“This amendment was produced in a little less than two years,” said Bschor. “The Forest Service could not have met that timeline without active participation by the State of Alaska, other federal agencies, communities of interests in Southeast Alaska and nationally, and the public. It was the common interest in a sustainable future for both the local communities and the natural resources of the Tongass that brought people together.”

“The extensive collaboration with many new and existing partners played a very important role in the development of this Amendment, and will continue to be an integral part of the forest management and implementation of the Plan in the future,” said Bschor.

Bschor expressed hope for the continued key role of the Tongass Futures Roundtable, a stakeholder group interested in Southeast Alaska land management and expressed thanks to The Nature Conservancy and several other foundations for sponsoring the Tongass Futures Roundtable. The Roundtable brings together organizations, groups and individuals of diverse perspectives about management and future of the Tongass and the surrounding communities.

The ROD and the Final EIS will be published in the Federal Register in early to mid-February. Under National Environmental Policy Act guidelines, the Forest can implement the Plan 30 days from that date.

More information, including the ROD, the Amended Plan, the supporting FEIS and related documents, can be found at <http://tongass-fpadjust.net/>.

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News Editor Note: A Media Tool Kit can be found at: <http://tongass-fpadjust.net/>

It includes, but is not limited to: this news release; maps; Q&As; fact sheets; photos of Regional Forester Denny Bschor and Tongass Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole; audio clips by Bschor and Cole; a planning timeline; the Record of Decision; the Final Environmental Impact Statement; and the Forest Plan.

Regional Forester Denny Bschor and Supervisor Forrest Cole are available for interviews beginning noon today. To speak with Bschor, contact Julie Speegle at (907) 586-7150. To speak with Cole, contact Phil Sammon at 907-228-6201.