

Why are we doing this EIS?

The current Tongass Forest Plan was revised in 1997. Since that time, the Forest Service has responded to a variety of appeals (33) and litigation on the processes used to create the 1997 Plan.

This EIS primarily responds to a recent decision issued by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Natural Resource Defense Council et al., v. United States Forest Service, et al., 421 F.3d 797*), which found inadequacies in the process used to develop the 1997 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This EIS also responds to the findings of the recently completed Tongass Forest Plan 5 Year Review.

Focus Issues

The scope of this EIS was initially determined by the Court in its 2005 ruling and the findings of the Forest Plan 5 Year Review. Additional information from a wide variety of public input was also considered to help clearly define the issues and was used in the development and analysis of alternatives. Three key issues drive the alternatives and the analysis:

1. Protection of high value roadless areas from road development and timber harvest activity on the Tongass National Forest is of local and national importance, particularly for wildlife and biodiversity, recreation, and tourism.
2. The Tongass National Forest needs to provide a sufficient timber supply to meet the market demand and help maintain a vibrant economy in Southeast Alaska.
3. Protection of the wildlife habitat and biodiversity of the Tongass National Forest is of local and national significance and is affected by road development and timber harvest activities.

Alternatives

Seven alternatives that respond to the purpose and need for action are considered in the Draft EIS.

- 1 **Alternative 1** keeps almost all remaining Inventoried Roadless Areas in a natural condition. Timber management is featured only on lands outside of these roadless areas.
- 2 **Alternative 2** keeps most Inventoried Roadless Areas in a natural condition. Timber management is featured on lands outside of these roadless areas, except for some areas where roads could logically be extended.
- 3 **Alternative 3** provides a mix of National Forest uses and activities similar to Alternative 2, with additional emphasis on timber management.
- 4 **Alternative 4** provides for a mix of National Forest uses, with additional emphasis on timber production sufficient to achieve an integrated industry. Timber management would occur in some Inventoried Roadless Areas not managed for timber production in the 1997 Forest Plan.
- 5 **Alternative 5**, No Action is the current Forest Plan (as amended) and provides for a moderately-high level of timber production along with strong resource protection measures.
- 6 **Alternative 6**, Proposed Action is similar to Alternative 5, No Action. It includes adjustments to the plan based on information generated during the recent 5 Year Plan Review and other minor clarifications and updates.
- 7 **Alternative 7** provides for economic timber harvest levels at the projected planning cycle demand, assuming a competitive, fully integrated industry. It also assumes that all volume required to meet the planning cycle demand is derived from National Forest System lands.

How do the Alternatives Relate to the Three Focus Issues?

The Draft EIS uses a number of different indicators to evaluate the effects of the alternatives with respect to the three focus issues. The following table provides a brief summary of the following key indicators:

Roadless Areas—the percent of the existing Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) that would be allocated to Land Use Designations (LUDs) that allow timber harvest and other development. Areas that are allocated to non-development LUDs would be maintained in a natural condition.

Timber Demand—the ability of the alternative to provide sufficient timber to meet the projected demand under four scenarios—Limited Lumber Industry, Expanded Lumber Industry, Medium Integrated Industry, High Integrated Industry—in 2020.

Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity—the minimum percent of original (1954) productive old growth remaining on National Forest System lands after 100+ years, status of the existing Forest Plan Old-Growth Conservation Strategy, and effects on landscape connectivity “pinch-points.”

Focus Issues

Alternatives	Roadless Areas	Timber Demand	Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity
1	Keeps almost all (99%) remaining IRAs in a natural condition.	Does not supply sufficient timber in 2020 to meet projected demand under any of the four scenarios.	88% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy. No major effects on landscape “pinch-points.”
2	Keeps most IRAs (91%) in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber to meet projected demand under Scenario 1 only.	86% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy. Some effect on one critical landscape “pinch-point.”
3	Keeps 23 high value IRAs (81% of the total) in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber to meet projected demand under Scenarios 1, 2, and 3, but not under Scenario 4.	84% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy. Some effect on one critical landscape “pinch-point.”
4	Keeps 64% of IRAs in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber in 2020 to meet projected demand under all four scenarios.	78% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy in only four biogeographic provinces. Affects three critical landscape “pinch-points.”
5	Keeps 74% of IRAs in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber to meet projected demand under Scenarios 1, 2, and 3, but not under Scenario 4.	82% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy. Some effect on one critical landscape “pinch-point.”
6	Keeps 75% of IRAs in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber to meet projected demand under Scenarios 1, 2, and 3, but not under Scenario 4.	82% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Keeps the current conservation strategy. Some effect on one critical landscape “pinch-point.”
7	Keeps 61% of IRAs in a natural condition.	Provides sufficient timber in 2020 to meet projected demand under all four scenarios.	76% of the original productive old growth would remain after 100+ years. Does not employ a conservation strategy. Affects four critical landscape “pinch-points.”

Decision Challenges

The Draft EIS does not identify a preferred alternative because the Forest Service is seeking public input to help make a more informed choice. A number of factors must be considered to find a balance among the many competing needs and desires for Tongass resources.

The main decision challenge is to select an alternative that addresses all three focus issues. One key aspect is how best to incorporate the 1997 Forest Plan Conservation Strategy into a selected alternative that also supports community economic vitality, through a more integrated timber industry, while minimizing effects on other uses.

Another aspect is the need to maintain an available land base large enough to meet timber demand if it develops over time. One approach would be to develop a phased implementation strategy that focuses timber harvest primarily in the roaded land base, with expansion into roadless areas only if demand increases.