Loggers and timber-dependent communities across Southeast Alaska are fighting for survival after multiple land withdrawals, changing government policies and countless environmental campaigns have closed most of the Tongass National Forest to logging.

And now, despite having succeeded in convincing Congress and the Forest Service to preserve more than two-thirds of the forest's old growth into exclusive domains for wildlife and recreational users, environmental groups have launched yet another public-opinion campaign depicting the Tongass as a last stand of ancient trees about to be shattered by clearcut loggers looting a national treasure.

"Stop the Looting of Alaska," read the banner headline on a full-page advertisement in the New York Times last month. Representing the latest volley in the endless battle between preservationists and those who work in the woods harvesting trees, the ad was sponsored by a San Francisco-based coalition of environmental groups. It also ran several times in the Capitol Hill newspaper, Roll Call.

"The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska is a major part of the world's last great intact temperate rainforest," read the ad. "But now, the trees are being clearcut and loaded onto ships for export to Asia. As the ancient forest is lost, so are the deer and the bear."

The ad included a clip-and-mail coupon inviting readers to join the "Alaska Emergency Response Team" for $25 or more. "We must have a way of stopping the few who try to ruin the quality of life for the rest of us — and that includes the looting of Alaska's public lands," the ad said.

Media reports gave the advertisement prominent coverage and billed it as the beginning of a new public-opinion campaign against big oil and timber.

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Young secures wetlands provision

Congressman Don Young secured a major wetlands provision in Clean Water Act reauthorization legislation which was introduced last month. Under the provision, all states with “substantially” conserved wetlands would operate under a less stringent wetlands permitting standard. The provision would allow for states to develop one acre of wetlands for every 10 acres of wetlands set aside in a conserved status. The new provision would allow for the use of an additional six million acres of wetlands in Alaska because over 60 million of the state’s 170 million acres of wetlands are in conserved status. Less than 300,000 acres of wetlands have been developed in the state. Under the new provision, Alaskans would still be required to mitigate wetlands losses, but they would not be required to avoid wetlands and mitigate for wetland losses under the 404 Clean Water Act permit process. The same minimization rules would apply to State and Native corporation lands. Young said the provision would streamline the permitting process and reduce the wait for government permits and clearances. The provision was adopted by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee which is working on the clean water bill. Similar legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Stevens and Murkowski. RDC and the Alaska Wetlands Coalition is working closely with the congressional delegation on the wetland bills.

Escort vessels considered for Cook Inlet

The U.S. Coast Guard has established a task force to determine whether tanker escorts are needed in Cook Inlet. The task force will include a wide range of stakeholders, including industry, local communities, government agencies and environmental groups.

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 mandated tanker escorts for Prince William Sound, Puget Sound and other waters, if necessary. The Coast Guard is now in the process of determining which waterways in the nation it will propose for tanker escorts. Earlier this year, the Coast Guard solicited comments from the public on whether the escorts should be required in Cook Inlet.

RDC has told the Coast Guard that a dedicated response vessel is an unnecessary expense and that the need for escort vessels is unwarranted. RDC noted Cook Inlet is a low volume port because of limited tanker traffic, and will continue to be so given trends in declining oil production. RDC also pointed out that ships have many navigational advantages in Cook Inlet, which is a large, open area of water, which gives ships considerable room to maneuver without the immediate threat of collision. Due to the Inlet’s shallow water, smooth bottom and currents that run parallel to the shoreline, a ship can anchor if problems arise, RDC noted.

State oil and gas lease sales

RDC has expressed strong support for proposed oil and gas lease sales covering state land and water in and around Cook Inlet. RDC believes Alaska still has enormous untapped energy potential and urged DNR to move forward with the sales. RDC is also encouraging the U.S. Minerals Management Service to move forward with federal OCS lease sale 419 in lower Cook Inlet. A number of RDC members also commented in support of the lease sale, responding to a March Action Alert on the issue.

A-J submits new schedule and plan

Echo Bay Mines has submitted a schedule and plan of new alternatives to the EPA to address concerns expressed by the federal agency in the TARI report released earlier this year on the reopening of the A-J Mine near Juneau. Major items being considered are alternative tailings disposal sites and eliminating the use of cyanide.

ANILCA Title XI regulations

The National Park Service is expected to release new draft regulations for Title XI of ANILCA later this month. The draft regulations are the result of a lawsuit which the Trustees for Alaska lost in U.S. District Court. TFA appealed to the 9th Circuit, and then Assistant Secretary of Interior George Frampton withdrew the regulations. RDC and the Alaska Miners Association, represented by Pacific Legal Foundation, supported the NPS in its original regulations.

Glavinovich to head AMEREF

Geologist Paul Glavinovich was elected President of the Alaska Mineral and Energy Resource Education Fund (AMEREF). Glavinovich, a member of the RDC Executive Committee, was elected to the post last month at AMEREF’s annual board meeting in Anchorage.

David Stone, Director of Public Affairs for Echo Bay Mines, was elected First Vice President and Teresa Irm, Resource Development Manager for Alaska Operations was elected Second Vice President. Jim Deagan, an aide to Senator Frank Murkowski, was re-elected Secretary. Allen Bingham, a partner in the accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche, will serve as Treasurer.

AMEREF is a non-profit organization that provides a popular resource education program to schools throughout the state.

Follows to head Knik Glacier task force

Don Follows, RDC’s volunteer tourism director, has been appointed Chairman of a task force studying the proposed development of a visitor center near Knik Glacier.

The visitor center would be built on a ridge about 50 miles northeast of Anchorage with a sweeping view of Knik Glacier. The complex would be connected to the Knik River Road by a low-profile tramway.

"I feel this project could establish a wonderful example of the state-private partnership that is necessary for the advancement of tourism in Alaska," said Follows. "It will take all parties working together to accomplish this very worthwhile development concept."
Loggers fight hungry tiger

"It's like feeding a hungry tiger. They keep coming back for more; using one excuse after another, reneging on one pledge after another. They continue to ratchet the noose around real working people in Southeast."" Thyes Shaub, Shaub & Associates

Legislature heads for home stretch

With a roughly month left in the legislative session, the hardest work still lies ahead on many of RDC's legislative priorities. We are entering the time of the year when important decisions are made quickly. People and organizations who are most able to respond quickly are the most effective in the final days and weeks of the session.

This year's legislative leadership and new administration have already achieved a number of major accomplishments. Governor Knowles announced late last month a state-sponsored campaign to educate Congress and others on the merits of opening the Coastal Plain of ANWR to oil and gas development. And earlier this session, both houses of the Legislature passed a resolution requesting Congress to increase statutory flexibility on wetlands use in Alaska.

There are still many legislative items that remain to be dealt with, including:

- **State Budget**: State expenditures still exceed revenues by roughly $500 million. The State cannot afford to continue living beyond its means, a situation of concern to all resource development industries. As the Legislature and Governor attempt to deal with the problem, serious discussion of meaningful solutions usually evokes loud opposition from special interest groups. Let the Legislature know what you think needs to be done.

  - **HB 121**: The salvage timber bill has passed the House and Senate and has been sent to the Governor. RDC supports this bill and believes it will serve as a vital forest management tool to help manage dead and dying forest in Alaska. Opponents of logging are hitting the Governor's administration may not be favorably inclined to support this legislation. The most important thing RDC members can do on these issues is speak up and be counted.

  - ** HB 128**: A bill applying to waste disposal permits and the granting of exemptions for resource development industries. As the Legislature and Governor attempt to deal with the problem, serious discussion of meaningful solutions usually evokes loud opposition from special interest groups. Let the Legislature know what you think needs to be done.

  - ** HB 207**: The Governor's reform within the House Resources Committee and was in the Finance Committee at the time of this writing. It was expected to reach the House floor around Juneau, but it's withering, just like many of the forest-dependent communities in perpetuity.

RDC board members met with Governor Knowles, Senate President Drue Pearce, House Speaker Gail Philips and other legislators during a recent visit to Juneau. Pictured above are Dan Kuck, Lyle Van Baren, Elizabeth Rensch, Jim Weeks, Governor Knowles, Becky Gay, Dave Parson, Thyes Shaub, Ken Freeman and Carl Portman.

HB 169: This bill, which recognizes DNR as the lead agency for mining, has passed the House and now is in Senate Resources.

With bills moving through committees on a daily basis, it's important to check with RDC for up-to-the-minute progress reports. The most important thing RDC members can do on these issues is speak up and be counted.

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In a scathing editorial, the Voice of the Times in Anchorage called the ad "undeterred garbage," labeling it as "yet another fund-raiser to save Alaska from Alaskans."

"Environmentalalist groups have become a dime a dozen in recent years," the Times said. "New ones pop up every day. Unfortunately for Alaska, half of the swarm of fear mongers has targeted this state to 'save.'"

"The Alaska Forest Association (AFA) called the ad unfair and misleading, and said it continues to give the public the wrong impression that the Tongass is in peril."

"Environmental groups should work to strike a balance and not just shut down access to resources," said Chris Gates, Executive Director of AFA. "Unfortunately, the public isn't getting objective and accurate information. People who contribute to these campaigns truly believe Alaska is under assault and they feel compelled to respond with their hard-earned dollars to save what's left."

But perception is often not reality, Gates warned, explaining that only a fraction of the forest has been disturbed by logging, which provides 30 percent of the private-sector jobs in the region.

"Under the most aggressive harvesting plan proposed, 80 percent of the old-growth forest will still be intact in the year 2015, and two-thirds will never be touched," Gates said.

Through the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), Congress closed all but 1.9 million acres of the 17 million-acre national forest to cutting, leaving two-thirds of the 5.7 million acres of commercial forested lands for the exclusive domain of wildlife, fishermen and recreational users. Ten percent of the Tongass, about 30 percent of the forested land, was supposed to be dedicated to supporting timber-dependent communities through the harvesting of timber on a 100-year rotation cycle, meaning that an area logged in this century would be grown back and ready for a second harvest in the next century. That was the plan -- the supposed "final balance" struck by Congress, environmental powers and timber inter- ests -- but it hasn't worked out very well for communities dependent on logging.

Not content with a 90 percent share of the pie, preservationists have relentlessly pushed since the passage of the ANILCA compromise, a series of public-opinion campaigns designed to create fear and the perception of a forest threatened by out of control, non-sustainable, logging. The campaigns were successful in establishing the Tongass as a "cause." Well-meaning citizens from coast to coast responded to passionate and emotional pleas to "save" the Tongass, which they came to believe was a last stand of ancient trees. Hundreds opened their wallets to the cause of silencing the chain saw.

In 1990, Congress passed the Tongass Timber Reform Act, which added additional land to the no-cut zones. Thousands of acres bordering salmon streams, beaches, scenic pass-sages, critical wildlife habitat areas and muskeg were put into buffer strips prohibiting logging. Formulas on how timber was to be paid were changed and a new allowable mix of high and lower-value logs was established. The end result of the reform package and subsequent administrative decrees was yet another smaller timber base, tougher environmental standards on in-dustry operations and rising costs to log lower-quality trees in more remote, higher-cost areas.

The siege on the timber industry didn't stop there, it only intensified.

In January 1993, the Clinton administration, a long time critic of timber dollars, proposed an amendment to a spending bill that would prohibit the Forest Service from spending money to set up the timber zones for animals that have not been declared threatened or endangered. The funding prohibition would delay the establishment of the zones for another year.

Meanwhile, Regional Forester Phil Janik is expected to make a decision soon about the implementation of the conservation zones. Senator Ted Stevens, however, has recently won approval of an amendment in a spending bill that would prohibit the Forest Service from spending money to set up the timber zones for animals that have not been declared threatened or endangered. The funding prohibition would delay the establishment of the zones for another year, but it may not survive the Clinton veto pen. The amendment would allow the Forest Service to buy buffers around active goshawk nests.

Environmentalists are enraged over the Stevens' amendment, claiming that substantial additional protections even beyond what the Forest Service has proposed are needed to ensure healthy and viable populations. But with so much of the forest now closed to logging and reserved for habitat protection and recreational uses, loggers strongly oppose...