The Tongass National Forest

No hype, just the basic facts

Timber Base and Annual Harvest

- At 17 million acres, the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska is the nation’s largest, home of 75,000 Alaskans who rely on it for jobs, fishing, hunting, subsistence, tourism and recreation.
- 10 million acres of the Tongass is forested, 5.4 million acres contains commercial quality timber.
- Federal policies and laws restrict the areas that can be harvested for timber production to 1.7 million acres of the Tongass. That is 10 percent of the total land area of the forest or 31 percent of the commercial timberlands.
- 6.6 million acres of the Tongass have been designated Wildland, an area prohibiting not only timber harvesting, but all development. An additional 4.1 million acres of the of the Tongass are in Forest Service land use zones prohibiting logging, leaving 65 percent of the forest off limits to harvesting.

- Average annual timber harvest: 10,000 acres
- Harvest rotation: 100 years
- Allowable harvest casing: 17,000 acres (which does not occur)
- Since 1954, 340,000 gigatons of trees have been harvested in the Tongass National Forest. That’s less than 2 percent of the Tongass or 17 percent of the area specifically allocated for logging.
- Under the current management plan, two-thirds of the old-growth acreage in the Tongass will never be touched by logging.

Sustainable timber harvests

- With appropriate silvicultural practice, the 1.7 million acres available for timber harvest in the Tongass is capable of sustainably producing 556 million board feet annually over a 100-year rotation, 642 million board feet annually over a 90-year rotation, or 776 million board feet annually over an 80-year rotation.

- The average annual harvest in the Tongass National Forest is 302 million board feet, a level well within sustainable capacity of the forest. The current land management plan allows a total harvest of 420 million board feet per year.

Fish and Wildlife

- The vast preponderance of historic habitat remains for virtually all species. There are no species that are facing a "short-term" viability crisis. Approximately 58 percent of the species that biologist consider old growth dependent reside in areas where logging is not allowed.

This back page is reserved for our monthly newsletter sponsor. This month’s sponsor, Southeast Stevedoring, donated the space to educate people readers need to know about facts on the Tongass.

Resource Development Council
121 W Fireweed, Suite 250
Anchorage, AK 99503
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Products from Tongass Timber

- Timber from the Tongass National Forest is manufactured into dimensional lumber, window and door stock, decking, lumber, boats and boat repair, paneling, fence posts, furniture and home, firewood, paper and paper products, gift items, handicrafts and souvenirs.
- It is also manufactured into dissolving pulp which is a component of textiles, fabric garments, upholstery, curlicues, carpeting, industrial belting, hose, tires, celophane/packing, sponges, sausage casing, artificial kidneys, nonwoven disposable protective clothing, encapsulate electronic equipment, high speed printing inks, piano sounding boards, guitars, lacquers, paints, coatings, pills, chaplets, dietary bakery goods, emulsifiers, low calorie ice cream, cosmetics, celophane (biodegradable wrap), toothpaste, formica, artificial leathers, molded luggage, laminates, tissage, photo film and artificial vanilla.

Beetle Infestation ...

(Continued from page 3)

rates by the worst pollutants in the entire Pacific Northwest.

Absent from the mailer was the fact that logging is occurring in areas heavily infested by the spruce bark beetle and that the infestation is transforming Kenai Peninsula viewsheds into graveyards of brown dead or dying trees.

Forest officials concede logged timber cannot stop the infestation, but emphasize that a combined program of harvesting and reforestation can restore forest health much faster than if no action is taken.

Forest scientists explain that new harvesting programs utilizing modern forest management initiatives to protect wildlife and fisheries will be a reforestation program that will lead to a young, healthy and vigorous-growing forest. Since most of Southeast Alaska is now a fire suppression area, they say logging would take out the dead trees, as opposed to nature’s way — fire. If no logging is allowed, many timber stands on the Kenai will revert to grasslands.

With its varied patterns of land ownership, the Kenai Peninsula is a great ecological, long-term experiment in forest management. Extensive logging is occurring near Homer on State and private land, very little cutting is taking place on the much larger expanses of the Peninsula. Only a fraction of the beetle infested spruce will be cut on the Chugach while no commercial logging will occur on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and Kenai Fjords National Park. Foresters will be watching the different rates of growth, comparing areas actively managed for logging and reforestation with those forests left to stand as grey ghosts.

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Final battle in the Tongass?

New TLMP proposal would upset balance, harm economy

The Southeast Alaska forest products industry is fighting for its life after the U.S. Forest Service unveiled its preferred alternative in the long-awaited revision of the Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP).

The preferred alternative would reduce the land base available for timber harvest by 30 percent and shrink the annual harvest ceiling from 450 million board feet (mbf) to 257 mbf. Industry and local community officials fear the reductions could deliver a lethal blow to the Southeast Alaska forest products industry, prevent the reopening of Southeast Alaska mills and severely damage local economies dependent on timber harvesting.

“If this plan is adopted, it will hurt Ketchikan Pulp Company, our workers and the communities of Southeast Alaska. This plan is a total violation of the compromise Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990 that Alaskans worked so hard to achieve,” said Ralph Lewis, President of Ketchikan Pulp.

“If this plan is implemented without some sort of modification, the Alaska timber industry and many of our Southeast Alaska communities will shrivel,” predicted Jack Phelps, Executive Director of the Southeast Alaska Forest Association.

In recent hearings across Southeast, Alaskans came in large numbers to speak out against the Forest Service’s Preferred Alternative in the recently-released Tongass Land Management Plan. Above, Ketchikan residents express support for the timber industry.

(Timber Reform Act of 1990)

How you can help Southeast Alaska and the timber industry...

- Ketchikan Pulp Company

- Southeast Stevedoring Corporation

- Resource Development Council

- Southeast Alaska Forest Association
RDC elects new officers, board

Scott Thorson to serve as President

Scott Thorson, President and owner of Network Business Systems, a sales and services organization specializing in Novell and Microsoft computer networks, has been elected President of the Resource Development Council. Thorson was elected to the one-year term at RDC’s 22nd Annual Meeting of its Statewide Board of Directors June 5 in Anchorage.

Allen Bingham, Partner at Deloitte & Touche, was elected Senior Vice President while John Sturgeon, President of Konkor Forest Products was re-elected Vice President. Re-elected to the office of Secretary was Jerry Booth, Vice President of Energy and Minerals at Cook Inlet Region, Inc. Mike Stone, Managing Partner at KMPG Peat Marwick, was elected Treasurer.

The Resource Development Council (RDC) is Alaska’s largest privately funded nonprofit economic development organization devoted to developing Alaska’s natural resources in an orderly and efficient manner and to create a broad-based, diversified economy while protecting and enhancing the environment.

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Writer & Editor
Carl Forrest

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Guest Opinion

by Jack Phelps, Executive Director, Alaska Forest Association

 Proposed TLMP: No science, bad policy

Implementation of TLMP must be delayed, the plan carefully scrutinized and largely rewritten, and the Forest Service put back in the timber supply business.

It came as no surprise that the Forest Service’s Preferred Alternative for the new Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) would crank the screws down tighter on logging in the Tongass. The proposal would reduce the available land base by adding 500,000 acres to existing no-cut zones in the form of Habitat Conservation Areas. It also withdraws more land for fish habitat protection by increasing buffers along anadromous fish streams. Bottom line, the plan will shrink the available land base to 1,2 million acres, and slash the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) from 420 mmbf to 244 mmbf (net sawlog, using a 18% conversion factor.)

Needless to say, such a large reduction in the ASQ will have disastrous consequences for the timber industry. In releasing the new figures, the Forest Service made the point that a 297 mmbf ASQ (sawlog plus utility) was sufficient to supply the Kenai Peninsula, but not to meet the long-term demand and still provide 100 mmbf for the independent sale program. This is a litany you can expect to hear repeated at least once a month for the next few months. Unfortunately, the Forest Service has been unable to consistently deliver 70 percent of its stated goal, and we have every reason to believe that level of performance will continue. Realistically, we can expect about 200 mmbf to be harvested from the Tongass under the new plan — and remember, this is sawlog plus utility.

It is plain to see where such a minuscule level of offerings would put the industry because there will not be enough wood to satisfy the RFP contracts and still make trees available for the SBA program. A divide and conquer scenario would develop: Long-term contracts would absorb the excess for failing to provide sufficient timber for the small operators, or Conversely a serious shortfall in long-term sale offerings would be blamed on the need to provide sales for the SBA program. Such shenanigans are really unnecessary, since the Tongass is fully capable of satisfying the needs of both programs with volume left over to wood other mills, including operations in Wrangell and Slihka.

In fact, in 1993 the Forest Service agreed with that assessment when it produced, selected and justified a TLMP revision designed to keep the jobs promised under the 1993 Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA). The now-famous Alternative P proposed an ASQ of 420 (net sawlog) and took a realistic look at the Anadromous Fish Habitat Assessment (AFHA) recommendations regarding stream buffers. The conclusion then was that only the lower three percent of non-forest related protection were justified by the science.

The new plan, with no new evidence to support the change, recommends an increase in buffer standards on so-called high-value streams. This recommendation comes despite a report published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) which indicates that the present level of salmon habitat protection in Alaska is adequate. The author of that study, Michael L. Murphy, is a well-recognized expert in fisheries research whose studies and published papers have strongly influenced habitat protection measures in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.

Similarly, the new plan imposes a wildfire protection strategy on the Tongass that may indeed be appropriate for this particular forest. Habitat Conservation Areas were developed as a protection strategy for some islands in the South Pacific and superimposed on the forests of the Pacific Northwest by Jack Ward Thomas, without adequate study.

Now that Thomas is Chief of the Forest Service, he is determined to impose HCAs in Alaska as well — again without a shred of evidence that they will work here — or that they are needed.

In the analysis, the Forest Service’s new TLMP proposal is a seriously-flawed document. It is driven by the Clinton administration’s anti-logging, environmental agenda. It is not driven by careful, reasoned scientific inquiry, despite the nearly 200 biologists on the Forest Service payroll in Alaska. It’s hard to believe so much money can be spent to produce so little by so many. The American taxpayer should be incensed, not to mention those of us in Southeast who depend on a steady supply of wood for our livelihoods.

If this plan is implemented with serious modifications, the timber industry and many of our communities will shrivel.

On May 1, I asked the USFS to extend the comment period to the end of the year. Everyone involved with timber should join me in that request. We must make it impossible for them to say no. Implementation of TLMP must be delayed, the plan carefully scrutinized and largely rewritten, and the USFS put back in the timber supply business.

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RDC supports extension of Tongass timber contract

The Resource Development Council recently passed a resolution endorsing a 15-year extension to the Ketchikan Pulp Company’s (KPC) timber supply contract with the U.S. Forest Service in the Tongass National Forest. RDC has also gone on record supporting federal legislation authorizing the extension.

The extension to KPC timber supply contract is critical to the future economic well-being of Southeast Alaska, a region which has lost 40 percent of its long-standing, year-round timber industry jobs over the past five years. Ketchikan, the fourth largest city in Alaska, is extremely dependent upon the continuation of this contract which provides the principal source of year-round employment in the region.

KPC’s current long-term timber supply contract expires in 2004. The remaining eight years in the contract term is insufficient for the company to amortize $200 million in environmental upgrades and energy efficiency improvements that are planned over the next several years. The improvements are necessary to ensure that the company remains competitive in the world pulp market and meets evolving environmental requirements.

The company is planning to convert its pulp mill to an elemental chlorine free process and expand its wastewater treatment plant, as well as upgrade pollution prevention systems. The company also plans to install new equipment and make modifications to further reduce toxicity levels of plant effluent and to relocate the discharge point of those effluents to ensure rapid dispersion of remaining trace chemicals, especially in sheltered waters.

KPC has already made considerable investments in environmental improvements, but without a long-term supply of timber, the company may be unable to make the additional improvements and could face closure. With an assured supply of timber, KPC says it can move forward to ensure the mill is environmentally sound and economically competitive for the long-term.

RDC believes the contract extension would promote a proper balance between multiple use interests. Federal legislation recently introduced by Senator Frank Murkowski would direct the Forest Service to supply Ketchikan Pulp with 192.5 million board feet of timber each year for 15 years. The bill would allow Ketchikan Pulp to convert its facility so that which manufactures other value added products that utilize pulp logs and residual chips as a raw material.

KPC, which obtained its original long-term contract in 1954, is the sole remaining pulp mill in Alaska. It comprises more than 50 percent of the total commercial forest service tax assessments for the Ketchikan Gateway Borough. With an annual payroll of $41 million, the company employs 900 people at its pulp and sawmill operations. More than 22 percent of all households in Ketchikan are dependent on KPC timber operations for a living and more than 25 percent of the city’s total annual employment wages. In Southeast, the industry generates more than 36 percent of the total employment.

“The issue is whether or not Alaskans or the Tongass can manage their vast forest lands to provide viable habitat for wildlife, recreation and a forest industry,” said RDC Board member Troy Reinhart, who serves as Public Relations Manager for KPC. “The experience over the past 40 years clearly confirms Alaskans can manage that balance very well.”

Reinhart added, “The Tongass forest lands and streams are healthy by any and all measures while thousands of people have been able to build productive lives living and producing useful products.”

Governor Knowles and the Legislature support the KPC extension.

TLMP … (Continued from page 4)

Unfortunately, the preferred alternative would place more land off limits, further restricting acreage available for harvest. The cost of this action will upset the balance that presently exists between preservation and development.

On the other hand, Alternative 2 of the TLMP document, strikes a balance similar to that which currently exists. It protects high value places within the multiple use sustainability at a cost still providing a sufficient land base for a healthy forest products industry.

The project would replace about 160,000 acres of clearcutting with a 1,600-acre temporary cut on the Tongass, equivalent to the total cut in the Tongass in 1954 and 1971 at a cost of more than $2.5 million. The Forest Service’s historical pattern of releasing about 70 percent of the allowable cut.

While Alaskans continue to debate the merits of cutting dead, beetle-killed timber across Southeast, the prospect of a renewed demand for spruce beetle activity increased 40 percent in 1995 over the dying levels detected the year before. The mortality, however, is episodic and is not expected to occur again for 10 or more years. Approximately 892,831 acres of ongoing and newly infested areas were detected last year, the highest level of activity on record. The most extensive areas of beetle infestations are in Southeast Alaskan (863,281 acres) and the Chilkat River basin (170,767 acres). More than 25 million spruce trees have been felled.

The Forest Service’s 1995 Fire Health Management Report revealed that beetle activity in the Chugach National Forest doubled in 1995 to more than 32,433 acres. It noted that beetle activity is increasing throughout the Turnagain Arm area, including Girdwood, Twenty Mile, Ingram Creek, Sixmile Rainforest, and Hope. The Forest Service also noted the beetle infestation is intense throughout many areas of the Kenai Peninsula, including Kachemak Bay, Kasilof, and Homer, beetle activity is extreme. More than 400,000 acres of spruce are infested with many stands having more than 60% mortality.

A significant increase in beetle-killed timber was found on the west side of Cook Inlet and the infestation more than doubled in the Anchorage Bowl where more than 8,000 acres of spruce were felled. Areas in Anchorage with the heaviest activity are the Turnagain and Eklutna River drainages have been discarded, but the Forest Service is reviewing public comments for a third proposal in the Resurrection and Palmer Creek valleys near Hope.

Environmentalists are not satisfied with the Forest Service decision to scale back logging plans and have admitted they won’t be happy until ALL logging plans are dropped.

The Alaska Center for the Environment (ACE) has formed the Forest Defense Network to whip up public opposition against logging and influence public policy. In a recent mass mailing, ACE noted the Forest Defense Network is kicking into high gear with a door-to-door campaign. Media campaigns are being developed and demonstrations are being planned among other events and programs. ACE is asking Alaskans to join its network, write letters, participate in direct actions and “help stop senseless logging.”

The campaign has generated scores of letters to the Anchorage Daily News and the Forest Service in opposition to logging. ACE has asked its members to host letter writing parties targeting not only the Anchorage Daily News, but newspapers outside Alaska, including the Los Angeles Times.

The cover of the ACE mailer featured a picture of a deer with the superimposed headline, “It’s Time To Cutclear Our Kenai Peninsula: Do You Agree or Disagree?” The mailer was filled with emotion and left readers with the impression that a healthy and green forest was being cleared at alarming rates.

(RDC Board member Paula Easley refers to a newspaper account of the devastating Big Lake Fire while addressing forest health. Foresters warn fire damage will rise throughout Southeast Alaska as beetle-killed trees fall and cover the forest floor. Picture below is David Parish.)
TLMP proposal flawed, reflects anti-logging, environmental agenda

(Continued from page 1)

Director of the Alaska Forest Association. Phelps labeled the Forest environmental agenda. He said the Director of the Alaska Forest Areas. 500,000 acres to existing no-cut zones in the form of Habitat Conservation Large blocksof old-growth timber within Tongass, strategy without any scientific study to Service's analysis of the plan's social effect on wildlife than people. Murkowski says that the Forest concerned that the plan would prevent short on wood. management plan and that the plan economic, social and wildlife analysis would free up enough timber to supply 95 percent of market demand and that KPC and other operations. The Forest proposed plan is adopted.

Critics of the plan, however, note that the socio-economic impact analy- sis is very superficial, follows no known econometric techniques and does not compare the effects of the alternatives. They also note that the Forest Service is changing the way timber volume is measured and is closing some of the most productive timber stands to log- ging. As a result, they don't believe the Forest Service will be able to meet demand or hold the line on job losses. Moreover, they point out that the Forest Service has historically released less than 70 percent of its allowable sale quantity for any given year. The proposed harvest level is in- sufficient to sustain the remaining in- dustry, let alone restore the lost capac- ity, according to timber consultant Thyes Shauh, an RDC Board member. Shauh explained that the real marketable harvest under the Forest Service pro- posal is only 237 mmbf, after deducting utility volume. When KPC's timber is deducted, only about 60 mmbf is left for existing independent producers, not 100 mmbf as the Forest Service has suggested.

Shauh said such harvest levels are inadequate to sustain independent mills and absolutely precludes reopening the Wrangell sawmill or consideration of a by-products facility in Sitka. She explained that the preferred alternative in TLMP favors restricting timber harvest more than is necessary to protect the environment, reflecting a philosophy by the Clinton administra- tion that erring on the side of caution is preferred. Shauh said research shows that current levels of protection for wildlife and fish are more than adequate on the Tongass. "Data shows that current measures to protect the environment and the region's wildlife are working," Shauh said. "Residents of Southeast Alaska can be proud that they have been good stewards of the Tongass Environmental measures here exceed those in place on any other national forest, proving that a healthy environ- ment can coexist with timber harvest- ing when multiple values share the Tongass."