



File Code: 1900
Date: June 24, 2016

Dear Planning Participant,

Today I am proud to announce the release of the Draft Record of Decision (ROD), Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and amended Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Tongass National Forest. This Forest Plan will guide management activities on about 17 million acres of National Forest System lands in Southeast Alaska for the next 10 to 15 years. The Forest Plan and associated FEIS were developed under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). I have enclosed a copy of the Draft Record of Decision, FEIS, and Forest Plan (hard copy and compact disc) for your review. You may also find these documents online located at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/R10/Tongass/PlanAmend>.

This Forest Plan represents my Selected Alternative (Alternative 5) in the Draft ROD and is based on recommendations of the Tongass Advisory Committee, a Federal Advisory Committee established by USDA to advise the Secretary of Agriculture and Chief of the Forest Service on transitioning the Tongass National Forest to young-growth forest management.

Before selecting Alternative 5, I reviewed the FEIS, including the supporting documents, and the comments made by the public during the planning process, either during scoping, during the 90-day Draft EIS comment period, or at subsistence hearings.

Highlights of the Draft Record of Decision include:

1. The Selected Alternative focuses on accelerating the transition from old-growth to young-growth timber harvest, maintaining a viable timber industry and promoting more sustainable and diverse local economies by promoting renewable energy.
2. Analysis indicates in order to maintain a viable timber industry and meet market demand, 46 million board feet (MMBF) of timber per year is required through the 15-year transition.
3. The Selected Alternative also includes new management direction that improves flexibility in permitting renewable energy development, including hydropower.
4. The Selected Alternative maintains the integrity of the Conservation Strategy to provide ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities and support the persistence of most native species in the plan area.
5. The plan amendment does not propose rulemaking to modify the 2001 Roadless Rule application to the Tongass National Forest.

Highlights of the Forest Plan include:

1. The Transportation and Utility System overlay Land Use Designation (LUD) was removed as well as all associated direction (i.e., "window" and "avoidance area") in the LUD Standards and Guidelines pertaining to application of this overlay LUD.
2. A new chapter (Chapter 5) adds applicable plan direction related to Young Growth, Renewable Energy, and Transportation Systems Corridors and other direction that applies to the entire plan area (forest-wide) or to specific LUDs.



3. The Priority of Direction (Chapter 1) was modified to change the priority of direction with respect to the new plan direction in Chapter 5.
4. Identification of lands as not suitable and suitable for timber production (Forest Plan Appendix A) was updated to meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.11).

Prior to my issuing a decision approving the plan amendment, there will be an objection process per Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 219, subpart B; published April 9, 2012 (77 FR 21162) that applies to plan amendments. This proposed plan amendment is subject to 36 CFR 219, subpart B. All documents (Draft Record of Decision, Forest Plan, and Final EIS) will be made available online at the time of public notice for the objection period. Only individuals and entities as defined in 36 CFR 219.53 who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan amendment during the opportunities for public comment as provided in subpart A (reference 36 CFR 219.16), may file an objection during the 60-day objection period. The objection period and the required 30-day timeframe for reviewing the FEIS will run concurrently. Official notices detailing the formal objection process for the Tongass Forest Plan Amendment will be published in the Federal Register and newspapers of record (*Juneau Empire* and *Ketchikan Daily News*). All notices will be published on the Tongass National Forest Plan Amendment website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/R10/Tongass/PlanAmend>. Those who have subscribed to receive Forest Plan Amendment project E-mail updates will be notified.

If you need additional information, please contact Susan Howle, Project Manager, at 907-228-6340.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Earl Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "M" and "S".

M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor, Tongass NF