

USDA Announces Selection of Tongass Advisory Committee Members *Notice of Intent to Amend Tongass Forest Plan*

WASHINGTON, May 22, 2014 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the selection of 15 advisory committee members and five alternates tasked with providing guidance and recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service as it transitions to a young growth timber program on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Also today, the Forest Service released for public comment a Notice of Intent to amend the 2008 Tongass Land Management Plan.

In a July 2013 memorandum “Addressing Sustainable Forestry in Southeast Alaska,” Secretary Vilsack stated his intent to transition to a predominantly young growth-based timber program in 10 to 15 years while maintaining a viable timber industry. The memo also requested that the Forest Service consider amending the forest plan and establish an advisory committee (TAC) to inform this process.

“Members of the Tongass Advisory Committee will have the chance to define common ground on this unique, nationally important forest,” said Vilsack. “The input of the committee will be essential as we chart a new future for both the public lands and local communities of Southeast Alaska.”

“We believe this advisory committee represents an opportunity for starting a new chapter in collaborative management on the Tongass,” said Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Robert Bonnie. “We welcome new ideas and perspectives on how to transition the Tongass National Forest to a timber program based on young growth management while maintaining jobs in the forest industry.”

The committee members and alternates were selected from 75 candidates who responded to the Secretary’s request for nominations. Meetings of the committee will be open to the public.

“We look forward to a productive conversation with the TAC on recommendations identifying options for transitioning to young growth timber harvests on the Tongass, especially as we consider a forest plan amendment,” said Forrest Cole, Supervisor of the Tongass National Forest. “Our goal is a smooth transition to a forest industry that utilizes young growth timber and provides jobs for local Alaskans for years to come.”

The Forest Service will also release for public comment a Notice of Intent to amend the 2008 Tongass Land Management Plan through a proposed action and need for change. In the Notice of Intent, the Forest Service proposes analyzing how to define the suitable timber base to support the transition, whether restrictions on harvest age should be relaxed, and whether changes in management direction regarding young growth should be considered. Additional updates will

reflect the improvements of the 2012 Planning Rule. The advisory committee will be asked to provide recommendations to be considered for inclusion in the Forest Service's proposed action, focusing in particular on ways in which the agency can accelerate the transition to a young growth timber program.

The forest plan will be amended using new 2012 Planning Rule, which calls for collaboration throughout the process. The advisory committee, in combination with public meetings, represents an opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to provide feedback. The Notice of Intent will be published in the Federal Register on May 27, 2014, kicking off a 30-day public comment period. Comments and TAC recommendations will be considered for inclusion in a proposed amendment and draft EIS, expected to be published by August 2015.

The first TAC meeting is currently scheduled to occur during the week of July 21st in Southeast Alaska. The committee will be asked to make recommendations no later than May 2015.

The committee members are:

Jaeleen J. Araujo; Juneau, AK; Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Organizations, and/or Alaska Native Corporation Representative

Wayne K. Benner; Thorne Bay; AK Federal, State, and Local Government Representative

Kirk A. Hardcastle; Juneau, AK; Representing other commercial users, those holding land use permits, or the public at large

Philip A. Hyatt; Thorne Bay, AK; Timber Industry Representative

Lynn Jungwirth; Hayfork, CA; Representing other commercial users, those holding land use permits, or the public at large

(Chris) John C. Maisch; Fairbanks, AK; Federal, State, and Local Government Representative

Brian T. McNitt; Sitka, AK; Representing national or regional environmental and/or conservation organizations

Eric L. Nichols; Ketchikan, AK; Timber Industry Representative

Richard J. Peterson; Kasaan, AK; Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Organizations, and/or Alaska Native Corporation Representative

Keith E. Rush; Juneau, AK; Representing national or regional environmental and/or conservation organizations

Carol M. Rushmore; Wrangell, AK; Federal, State, and Local Government Representative

Erin Steinkruger; Portland, OR; Representing other commercial users, those holding land use permits, or the public at large

Andrew L. Thoms; Sitka, AK; Representing national or regional environmental and/or conservation organizations

(Woody) Lawrence A. Widmark; Sitka, AK; Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Organizations, and/or Alaska Native Corporation Representative

(Wade) Jeffrey W. Zammit; East Sound, WA; Timber Industry Representative

Alternates:

Leslie A. Cronk; Ketchikan, AK; Timber Industry Representative

Jason R. Custer; Ketchikan, AK; Other commercial users, those holding land use permits, or the public at large

Robert D. Mills; Kake, AK; Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Organizations, and/or Alaska Native Corporation representatives

Christopher W. Rose; Sutton, AK; National or regional environmental and/or conservation organizations

Kathryn A. Troll; Juneau, AK; Federal, State, and Local Government Representatives

The charter, background information, and other information for the Tongass Advisory Committee can be found on the Tongass National Forest website, www.fs.usda.gov/goto/R10/Tongass/TAC

Information on the Forest Plan Amendment process can be found at www.fs.usda.gov/land/tongass/landmanagement.

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