



10-Year Timber Sale Contracts

Issue

The previous administration made a commitment to the forest products industry in Alaska for four, 10-year timber sale contracts to aid in stabilizing the existing industry infrastructure and provide a basis from an integrated forest product industry. Current administration policies with respect to activities within inventoried roadless areas have greatly reduced the land base from which these contracts could be planned. In an effort to sustain the remaining forest products industries, timber industry stakeholders, including the State of Alaska, continue to press for contracts that are not possible under current roadless policies.

Background

The Alaska Region received direction from the previous administration and a \$2 million special allocation in FY09 to begin analyzing several proposed 10-year contracts designed to produce 10-20 mmbf/year. The 10-year contract projects are in addition to the normal program of work planned for the fiscal year. Four potential project areas have been identified with the help of the Tongass Futures Roundtable. The first priority is the Wrangell Island project, which has a contract in place to complete the NEPA analysis. In FY10, the Tongass received \$2.5 million to conduct the analysis on the second priority project, which is the Big Thorne project. This project also has a contract in place to complete NEPA analysis. The third and fourth priority project areas have been identified with the help of the Tongass Futures Roundtable but are pending until either they can be absorbed into the normal program of work or additional funding is available. To date, no additional funding has been provided toward this objective. All four of the project areas selected included both roaded and inventoried roadless area lands, consistent with the direction in the approved Tongass Land Management Plan and with the Tongass interim exemption to the 2001 roadless area rule.

Current Situation

In May 2009, and again in May 2010, the Secretary issued a Memorandum whereby the “delegations of authority to manage and administer the national forest...are revised to reserve to the Secretary the authority to approve or disapprove road construction or reconstruction and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in those areas identified in the set of inventoried roadless area maps contained in the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation, Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume 2 dated November 2000.”

On March 4, 2011, Alaska District Court Judge John Sedwick issued a decision vacating the Tongass exemption to the 2001 roadless area rule.

Given Departmental direction, the recent court decision, and consideration of goals and objectives of the Transition Framework for Southeast Alaska, all long-term contracts (e.g., stewardship and timber sale) will consider timber harvest in the roaded base only, thereby reducing overall project volumes and making commitments for larger scale, 10-year contracts more difficult to obtain.

More Information

Dave P Harris, Director of Forest Management, Alaska Region, 907-586-7875, dpharris@fs.fed.us.