



# Tongass National Forest

USDA Forest Service

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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With 1 photo, 1 map

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### Tongass National Forest releases Big Thorne ROD

**KETCHIKAN, Ak., July 1**— The Tongass National Forest issued its Record of Decision (ROD) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Big Thorne Project today. The decision allows for the harvest of 148.9 million board feet from approximately 6,186 acres of old-growth and 2,299 acres of young-growth near Thorne Bay and Coffman Cove on Prince of Wales Island within the Thorne Bay Ranger District.

The Forest Service believes the action could help stabilize the timber industry in Southeast Alaska as the Tongass makes a shift toward young growth timber harvests in the future.

“The Big Thorne decision is a critical step in the Tongass National Forest’s transition to young growth timber management,” explained Forrest Cole, forest supervisor. “By providing a stable supply of timber to the industry now, we are giving the Forest Service and the industry the breathing space needed to prepare for the transition to young growth timber,” said Cole.

“A stable supply of wood helps the industry have confidence in their wood supply over the next several years. The Big Thorne project also allows the Forest Service time to prepare young growth projects for offer in the immediate future.”

The Forest Service projects that Big Thorne will support over 600 annualized jobs and provide opportunities for a variety of sale sizes, supplying opportunities for small local operators and larger operators in Southeast Alaska.

The Big Thorne Decision allows for a 6- to 10-year supply of timber, which could provide stability to the industry and sustain jobs while giving sawmills an opportunity to retool to process young growth timber and seek new markets. Meanwhile the Forest Service will invest its planning efforts in young growth timber projects.

The longer term supply will also give the industry time to investigate the current demand for young growth wood products and cultivate markets with the greatest potential for future sales.

“The Forest recognizes the importance of this project and its effects on the people in the region, particularly to communities on Prince of Wales Island,” said Cole. “Timber plays an important role in the economy and culture of Southeast Alaska.”

## **Big Thorne ROD**

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The release of the Big Thorne FEIS and ROD represents a critical juncture in the cooperative work of the Tongass National Forest, Southeast Alaska communities, the timber industry, and other stakeholders as they begin the logical transition to young growth timber harvests.

The Big Thorne project will be offered as a stewardship contract, which allows the Forest Service to foster continued collaboration and reduce risk to contractors by allowing contracts with terms up to 10 years.

Equally important, offering Big Thorne under the stewardship contracting authority enables the agency to apply the anticipated timber receipts toward the completion of important landscape restoration and enhancement activities. These stewardship projects offer another opportunity for job creation in Southeast Alaska.

In early 2011, several local communities and partners worked with the Thorne Bay District Ranger to identify priority projects which will help meet the desired conditions for the area. Some of those projects are now being proposed for the Big Thorne stewardship contract.

The Forest Service will be holding public meetings in Thorne Bay, Coffman Cove, and Ketchikan to discuss the overall project and provide an opportunity for local businesses and partners to consider how their earlier plans can be implemented now and in future contracts.

The forest supervisor has selected Alternative 3 from the FEIS, with modifications. The selected alternative differs from the description of Alternative 3 found in the Draft EIS. It includes fewer acres of old growth timber and even-aged harvest. It requires the closure of 15 miles of road near Honker Divide during wolf trapping season, from Dec. 1 to May 1. It allows the construction of 10 fewer miles of road, but allows key roads to remain open for one to five years after the harvest.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision can be found online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/tongass/>. A 45-day appeal period is required after the release of the ROD, followed by up to 45 days for response to any appeals.

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**Cutline:** A Forest Service employee examines a tree on the Thorne Bay Ranger District as the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Big Thorne Project is prepared.

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