



Forest Plan Revision

Tongass National Forest



At-Risk Species in Management Plan Revision

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS)?

Under the current forest plan, the Forest Service manages for Regional Forester Sensitive Species. Sensitive species are defined as “Those plant and animal species identified by a regional forester for which population viability is a concern, as evidenced by either: a) significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density, or b) significant current or predicted downward trends in habitat capability that would reduce a species' existing distribution” (Forest Service Manual 2670). The goal of identifying sensitive species is to ensure that population abundance and distribution are adequate to prevent extirpation of the species from the forest and prevent a species from needing to be federally listed under the Endangered Species Act.

What are at-risk species?

The 2012 Planning Rule defines “at-risk species” as consisting of two groups: 1) Federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species; and 2) species of conservation concern.

What are Species of Conservation Concern (SCC)?

The 2012 Planning Rule replaced the RFSS designation with SCC. A SCC is “a species, other than a federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed or

candidate species, that is known to occur in the plan area, and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area” (36 CFR 219.9(c)).

The Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12.52) describes specific criteria to identify a species of conservation concern. A description of how these criteria are used to identify plant and animal species for the Tongass will be made available on the project website.

Limitations on the designation of an SCC include:

- The species must be native and known to occur in the plan area.
- The best available scientific information must indicate substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area.
- There must be sufficient scientific information available to conclude that substantial concern exists.
- The species occurrence must not be “accidental,” or well outside its current range.

Who is responsible for determining whether species are federally listed species or species of conservation concern?

Federally listed species are designated by either the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (terrestrial species) or NOAA Fisheries (marine and anadromous species)

under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. Categories of federal listing under ESA include endangered, threatened, proposed, and candidate. The ESA was created to protect critically imperiled species from extinction and identify a path towards their recovery.

A species of conservation concern (SCC) is a classification defined by Forest Service in the 2012 Planning Rule. The Regional Forester designates the species of conservation concern list for each national forest.

What is the process for identifying species of conservation concern?

We evaluate species for species of conservation concern listing by following a process outlined in Forest Service National Handbook Directive FSH 1909.12 § 12.52c-d. As species with known threats are considered, Forest Service specialists review the best available scientific information using databases, scientific studies, local information, and expert knowledge to determine whether there is substantial concern that a species may not persist in the plan area over the long-term.

What is “substantial concern”?

Substantial concern arises when the best available scientific information indicates that a particular species may not persist within the forest over the long-term. Considerations for determining substantial concern include:

1. Decreasing population (abundance or distribution) or habitat availability.
2. Significant threats, particularly when threats are novel or greater than expected under natural variation.
3. Other changes in demographics or life history characteristics that could influence long-term persistence in the plan area.
4. Rarity, though only in concert with the conditions described above, as many species are naturally rare.

Will plan components be developed for species other than those identified as at-risk species?

Plan components developed at the ecosystem level are intended to provide ecological conditions to support

all native plant and animal species in a forest plan area. Additional plan components are added to address issues identified during plan revision, including issues related to species. For example plan components may be developed to better manage for animal and plant species that have value to local communities, including species important for subsistence such as deer and salmon. In addition, a few plan components may be developed for general wildlife groups such as amphibians or pollinators.

Plan components developed for at-risk species often also provide ecological conditions to support species that are not considered at-risk. The overall intent of the plans developed under the 2012 Planning Rule is to manage for diverse ecological conditions that are resilient and sustainable and provide for the persistence of native species.



How can the public be involved?

The Tongass National Forest is committed to involving the public in transparent, meaningful dialogue to shape a plan that results in the sustainable management of resources, goods, and services.

For more information or to sign up for our email distribution list, please refer to the Tongass Revision Website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105492>