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Dear Reader,

I am pleased to announce the availability of the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment (Forest Plan Amendment). The effective date of the Forest Plan Amendment is 30 days after publication of the notice of Forest Plan Amendment approval in the newspaper of record, the *Ketchikan Daily News*. We have worked hard to develop these final documents and have incorporated valuable input from you during opportunities for public participation. Thank you for your interest and involvement in this effort.

The Forest Plan Amendment amends the 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (2008 Forest Plan) and describes resource management practices, levels of resource production and management, and the availability and suitability of lands for different kinds of resource management. The Forest Plan Amendment guides all natural resource management projects and activities and establishes management direction for the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Plan Amendment was developed using the current Planning Rule, issued in 2012, and embodies the provisions of the National Forest Management Act, the implementing regulations, and other guiding documents.

The Forest Plan Amendment was shaped by best available science, current laws, and public participation including Ketchikan High School youth; participation of a cooperating agency (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); consultation with Alaska Native tribes and Alaska Native Corporations; advice and recommendations from the Tongass Advisory Committee, a Federal Advisory Committee established by the U. S. Department of Agriculture; and significant public contributions from 12 open house meetings, nine subsistence hearings, and the receipt of over 165,000 public comments. Guidance in the amended Forest Plan provides for:

- Transitioning to a more economically, socially and ecologically sustainable timber program on the Tongass; and
- Promoting more sustainable and diverse local economies by encouraging renewable energy production.

Highlights of my decision include:

1. Accelerating the transition (from 32 years under the 2008 Forest Plan to 16 years) from old-growth to young-growth forest management, and maintaining a viable timber industry.
2. Promoting more sustainable and diverse local economies by encouraging renewable energy production.
3. Maintaining the integrity of the Tongass Conservation Strategy to provide ecological conditions that maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities and support the persistence of most native species in the plan area.



4. Providing greater clarity regarding the intended long-term management of the Tongass 77 Watersheds and The Nature Conservancy/Audubon Conservation Priority Areas.
5. Committing to producing a report that documents the results of the ongoing inventory work under the Challenge Cost Share Agreement with State and Private Forestry and the State of Alaska, and to make this report available to industry stakeholders and the public for review.
6. Committing to posting the current draft five-year timber sale schedule on the public Tongass web page, by December 31, 2016, and updating and posting annually by December 31st of each year.
7. Committing to a consideration of the “no net loss” concept recommended by the Tongass Advisory Committee (Forest Plan, Appendix B) as the Forest monitors the effectiveness of the Forest Plan’s plan components.
8. Making corrections (known as errata) to the June 2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan final environmental impact statement (FEIS).

Highlights of the amended Forest Plan include:

1. Removing the Transportation and Utility System overlay Land Use Designation (LUD) as well as all associated direction (i.e., “window” and “avoidance area”) in the management prescriptions in Chapter 3.
2. Including a new Chapter (Chapter 5) that includes plan content that was developed under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 219) that provides applicable plan direction related to Young Growth, Renewable Energy, and Transportation Systems Corridors and other plan direction that applies to the plan area (forest-wide) or to specific LUDs.
3. Adding management approaches to Young Growth, Renewable Energy, and Transportation Systems Corridors direction, and forest-wide direction in Chapter 5.

Forest Plan Amendment documents are available on the Tongass National Forest Plan Amendment Web site at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/R10/Tongass/PlanAmend>. These documents are also available for viewing at the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Ketchikan, and at Tongass National Forest Ranger District Offices.

For more information, contact Sue Jennings, Forest Planner at 907-772-5864 or sjennings@fs.fed.us.

Again, I sincerely thank you for your continued involvement in the Forest Plan Amendment. I look forward to working with you as we implement the amended Forest Plan in the coming years.

Sincerely,



M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor, Tongass NF