

## Record of Decision

### Timber Sale Program Adaptive Management Strategy

The Timber Sale Program Adaptive Management Strategy restricts timber sales and associated road construction to a specified portion, or phase, of the ASQ land base until actual timber harvest indicates the need for a larger land base. Land management activities unrelated to timber sales are not affected by the Strategy. The map of land included in each phase of the Strategy is included on the compact disc of the Final EIS and is also available on the internet at [www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/).

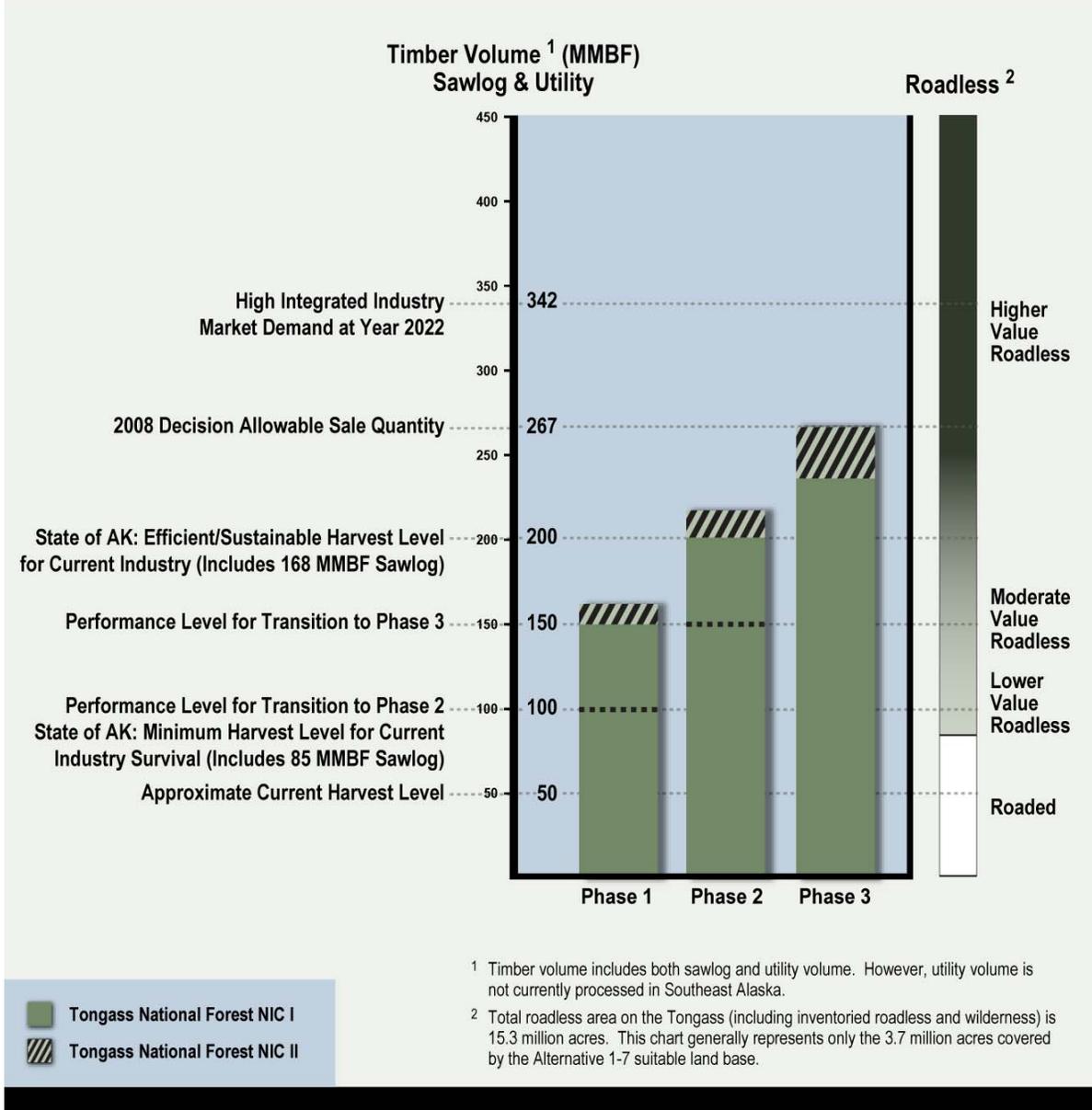
The Strategy is an extra step the Forest Service is taking to respond to recommendations from many parties that we avoid timber harvest and road construction in areas of the Tongass that are perceived as being more environmentally sensitive unless demand materializes to warrant such activity in those areas. The Strategy is based on three critical factors:

1. The long-term demand for timber from the Tongass is inherently very uncertain, and is influenced by the ability of all interested parties to work together to stabilize the timber supply.
2. The annual average ASQ of 267 MMBF is considerably higher than the current level of timber harvest on the Tongass.
3. The land base associated with the ASQ includes roadless areas, many of which are highly valued by substantial portions of the public.

As noted earlier, and as depicted in Figure 1, the VCUs in the Alternative 6 suitable land base have been evaluated according to each VCU's roadless values. The land base includes Roaded, Lower Value, Moderate Value, and Higher Value Roadless components. The Roadless column on the right side of the figure can be compared with the corresponding volume numbers on the left. The volume numbers reflect the estimated sustainable level of timber harvest associated with that portion of the land base. In general, a sustained harvest level of 100 MMBF would require the Roaded and much of the Lower Value Roadless portion of the land base; a level of 150 MMBF would require Roaded, Lower Value Roadless and some Moderate Value Roadless portions; a harvest level of 200 MMBF would require most of the remaining Moderate Value Roadless portions. Any harvest level over 200 MMBF would require entry into some of the Higher Value Roadless portions of the suitable land base.

Figure 1 also displays information received from the State of Alaska regarding the threshold levels of economically feasible Tongass timber sale volume that the State and the Forest Service believe are necessary over the short, medium, and long term. The State estimates that the currently operating sawmills need at least 83.5 MMBF of economically feasible sawtimber to remain in operation over the next one to two years. Over the longer term, an annual offer level of 167.5 MMBF of economic sawtimber from the Tongass would allow existing mills to operate efficiently, meaning two shifts per day, which would substantially increase their ability to compete in world markets. This level would also provide 30 MMBF annually for the veneer plant in Ketchikan to process low grade sawlogs. The majority of this volume would be derived from NIC I lands, which are more economically feasible because the timber can be harvested from them using conventional logging systems. Some volume from intermixed NIC II lands would also be included. When the utility volume is included, for which no processing facilities currently exist in Southeast Alaska, the total annual offer level needed from the Tongass to sustain the existing sawmills and veneer mill operating at efficient levels would be approximately 200 MMBF. The Strategy includes three phases:

**Figure 1. Timber Sale Program Adaptive Management Strategy**



**Phase 1** – Phase 1 includes most of the roded portion of the ASQ land base, along with most of the lower value inventoried roadless areas. The Phase 1 portion of the land base could sustain a level of timber harvest of about 150 MMBF. The scheduled timber sale program will generally be confined to this land base until such time as the level of timber harvest reaches at least 100 MMBF for two consecutive years. Personal use of timber, micro sales,<sup>22</sup> salvage sales, small commercial timber sales generally less than one MMBF, young-growth management projects, and the roads associated with these activities, would be allowed in development LUDs outside of the Phase 1 portion of the ASQ land base. Total scheduled timber harvest will be monitored each fiscal year and will count toward both ASQ and the 100 MMBF performance level. Timber harvest conducted in non-

<sup>22</sup> Micro sales are timber sales on Prince of Wales Island of down or dead trees totaling no more than 50 thousand board feet, to supply small niche-market timber processors.

## Record of Decision

development LUDs for purposes other than timber production (e.g., wildlife habitat improvement) will not count toward either ASQ or the Adaptive Management Strategy's performance levels.

**Phase 2** – Phase 2 includes Phase 1 lands and most of the moderate value roadless areas. The Phase 2 portion of the ASQ land base could sustain a level of timber harvest of about 200 MMBF. The scheduled timber sale program will generally be confined to this land base until such time as the level of timber harvest reaches at least 150 MMBF for two consecutive years. Personal use of timber, micro sales, salvage sales, small commercial timber sales generally less than one MMBF, young-growth management projects, and the roads associated with these activities, would be allowed in development LUDs outside of the Phase 2 portion of the ASQ land base. Total scheduled timber harvest will be monitored each fiscal year and will count toward both ASQ and the 150 MMBF performance level. Timber harvest conducted in non-development LUDs for purposes other than timber production (e.g., wildlife habitat improvement) will not count toward either ASQ or the Adaptive Management Strategy's performance levels.

**Phase 3** – Phase 3 includes the remaining ASQ land base.

In each phase, timber sale planning and sale preparation will be done within the corresponding portion of the land base (with the exceptions noted above for micro sales, small sales, salvage sales, and young-growth projects) until actual timber harvest performance indicates transition to the next phase is needed. The transition from one phase to the next must occur at a level lower than the maximum sustainable harvest level of the phase due to the lag time required for the timber sale planning process to be completed. This will allow flexibility for the Forest Service to complete the NEPA process and prepare a volume of timber ready to be offered for sale (referred to as shelf volume) ahead of actually offering the timber for sale (timber sold but not harvested is referred to as volume under contract). Adequate volume must be maintained in each category to respond quickly to short-term increases in harvest levels. A portion of shelf volume will normally be offered for sale each year to maintain an adequate level of volume under contract. Essentially, shelf volume replaces volume harvested each year, and would also be available for any new processing facilities that may be built. The amounts needed in these categories are a volume under contract equal to three years of volume harvested, and shelf volume equal to an additional three to five years of volume harvested. To the degree the Forest Service is successful in maintaining these levels, the transition from one phase of the Strategy to another will be seamless. The levels of volume available will be determined by the amount of funding appropriated by Congress; the ability of the Forest Service to prepare and offer economic timber for sale; and the ability of industry to purchase, harvest, process, and sell their products.

## Timber Sale Economics

Providing economic timber sales in Southeast Alaska has always been a challenge and is expected to remain so into the future. The basic lack of infrastructure in a relatively isolated and harsh environment significantly affects development and operational costs. Earlier timber sale programs included significant investments in infrastructure development to aid individual timber sales be more economic. In recent years, investments in deferred road maintenance and construction of long term system roads in timber sale project areas has helped ensure timber sales are economic. Timber sale planning and the manner in which Forest Plan standards and guidelines are applied to specific timber sales can have significant cost consequences on the sales. Since 1997, monitoring of timber sale projects and of the implementation of the Forest Plan has revealed inconsistent interpretation and application of certain Forest Plan standards and guidelines, with resulting adverse consequences on timber sale economics. Similar issues that affect timber sale economics arose during the Forest Plan 5-Year Review and the review of the Forest Plan's conservation strategy. Evaluation of this issue during preparation of the 2008 Forest Plan Amendment indicates timber sales can be designed to be economic under most market conditions if the Forest Plan standards and guidelines are consistently interpreted and applied within the intent of the Forest Plan. Forest Plan implementation training will be conducted to ensure that the Plan is implemented consistently, effectively, and efficiently. This will include training in planning timber sales to fully meet the intent of the Forest Plan and also to be as economic as possible. Implementation of the 2008 Forest Plan will