

Summary of 2016 amendment.

The Plan Amendment made the following major changes to the Plan:

- It allows old-growth harvest only within that portion of the Tongass included in Phase 1 of the timber sale program adaptive management strategy included in the 2008 Tongass Forest Plan Amendment;
- It allows young-growth harvest in all three phases of the 2008 timber sale program adaptive management strategy, but only outside of roadless areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule.
- It allows young-growth management in development Land Use Designations (LUDs) and in the Old-growth Habitat land use designation (LUD), beach and estuary fringe, and Riparian Management Areas (RMAs) outside of Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA) stream buffers, subject to certain conditions and for a specified period of time;
- It establishes direction to protect priority watersheds.
- It modifies the network of old-growth reserves (OGRs) to maintain their effectiveness.
- It includes new management direction to facilitate renewable energy production

In 2016, we amended the Tongass Plan. It amended the 2008 Plan. The amended Forest Plan includes edits throughout the entire document; however, the substantive changes, which constitute the Plan Amendment, are set out in Chapter 5.

Secretary of Agriculture Memorandum 1044-009

The Plan Amendment is consistent with the Secretary of Agriculture Memorandum 1044-009, *Addressing Sustainable Forestry in Southeast Alaska*, on July 2, 2013. It directed management of the Tongass National Forest to expedite the transition away from old-growth timber harvesting and towards a forest products industry that uses predominantly young-growth forests. It set a goal of doing this within 10 to 15 years. In contrast the 2008 record of decision assumed that young growth could potentially comprise a substantial portion of the Tongass timber program by 2038. (2008 ROD, p 50).

Purpose of the Amendment

The purpose of the amendment is to carry out the 2013 memorandum and:

- Review lands within the plan area to determine suitability for timber production, especially young-growth timber stands.
- Identify the projected timber sale quantity (PTSQ) and the sustained yield limit (i.e., the ecological yield of timber that can be removed annually on a sustained yield basis).
- Establish plan components (e.g., standards and guidelines) for young-growth forest management and renewable energy development to guide future project decision-making.
- Consolidate modifications made to the Forest Plan since its approval.

Significant Issues:

Issue 1 –Young Growth Transition

The Secretary of Agriculture asked the Forest Service to transition to a young growth-based timber management program on the Tongass National Forest in 10 to 15 years, which is more rapid than planned (30 years). The issue concerns financial efficiency, salability, and volume of future timber sales.

Issue 2 – Renewable Energy

The development of renewable energy projects on the Tongass would help Southeast Alaska communities reduce fossil fuel dependence, stimulate economic development, and lower carbon emissions in the Region.

Issue 3 –Inventoried Roadless Areas

The EIS evaluated two alternatives that allowed harvest in roadless areas. Alternative 2 allowed harvest in “roaded-roadless areas.” While alternative 3 assumed the Tongass was exempted from the Roadless Rule.

Issue 4 – Wildlife Habitat and the Old-growth Habitat Conservation Strategy

The Tongass Conservation Strategy is important for the continued health of old-growth associated wildlife populations in Southeast Alaska. What are the effects of increased harvest of young-growth on the strategy?

Alternatives:

The EIS evaluated 5 alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action) carries out the Secretary's Memorandum without amending the plan. This alternative would harvest timber at a rate of 46 MMBF per year (equivalent to the harvest needed to meet the projected timber demand). It would emphasize young growth and minimize old growth while maintaining 46 MMBF per year.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action) amends the plan and assumes rulemaking for the roadless rule. The portions of inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) that were roaded before the 2001 Roadless Rule and during the 2001 Roadless Rule exemption period for the Tongass would be available for young-growth and old-growth harvest. Unlike Alternative 2, this alternative would allow young-growth management in both development and natural setting LUDs, in beach and estuary fringe, Riparian Management Areas (RMAs), and high-vulnerability karst.

Alternative 3 amends the plan and assumes rulemaking for the roadless rule. This alternative would allow young-growth and old-growth harvest in 2001 Roadless Rule IRAs. (Otherwise similar to Alternative 2)

Alternative 4 amends the plan and assumes the roadless rule is not changed. This alternative only allows young-growth management in development land use designations (LUDs only).

Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative) amends the plan. This alternative is based on the recommendations from the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC), a formally established Federal Advisory Committee. The Roadless Rule applies. Similar to Alternative 2 additional riparian areas protected.

State of Alaska Alternative.

The State of Alaska proposed an alternative which was modeled and analyzed intensively before removing it from detailed consideration. Similar to Alternative 1 (no action), no commercial harvest would be allowed in non-development LUDs, Beach and Estuary Fringe, Riparian Management Areas (RMAs), or high-vulnerability karst. Modeling results indicated that transitioning to a point where about 41 million board feet (MMBF) of young growth and 5 MMBF of old growth could be harvested each year would require just over 30 years.

Timber Demand

Daniels et al. (2016)¹ made timber demand projections based on the young-growth transition.

Therefore, Alternatives 1 through 5 were designed to correspond with current demand projections and produce a projected timber sale quantity (PTSQ) of about 46 MMBF per year during the next 15 years, with old growth making up a decreasing percentage of the total. Old-growth volume would continue to decrease until it reaches about 5 MMBF per year and it would remain at that level, to support limited small timber operators. As more young growth becomes economic to harvest, the PTSQ would be allowed to increase.

¹ Daniels, Jean M.; Paruszkiewicz, Michael D.; Alexander, Susan J. 2016. Tongass National Forest timber demand: projections for 2015 to 2030. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-934. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 53 p.