



KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

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Tongass Advisory Committee finishes its plan for changing forest strategy

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The Tongass Advisory Committee late Friday morning — and despite criticism from both the timber industry and conservationists — voted 14-0 to approve a package of recommendations aimed at helping to transition logging in the almost 17 million acre Tongass National Forest from old-growth timber to young-growth timber.

The TAC — which includes government, timber industry, Alaska Native and other representatives — has worked on the recommendations in a series of meetings held throughout Southeast Alaska for about nine months. This was the committee's second meeting in Ketchikan.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture — which oversees the U.S. Forest Service — previously mandated a transition to young-growth timber.

Some TAC members jokingly asked if they'd still have to pay federal taxes after passing the recommendations, while others likened the process to having a child and said that there's still work to be done raising the child.

Co-chairwoman Lynn Jungwirth, following the TAC's vote, said she's excited to see how the next 15 years play out in the Tongass.

"I think there is a chance that we can make a transition to a kind of forest management on federal lands that has social license so that people can have livelihoods and backyards and occupations and a wonderful forest," Jungwirth said. "It's been a privilege to try and get ahead of that transition before the catastrophe."

Forest Service Regional Forester Beth Pendleton, following the TAC's vote, called the committee's work "absolutely monumental."

"There's still more work to do, and I have every confidence that the recommendations and input you're providing will serve the transition very well," Pendleton said.

Pendleton added that she "absolutely" recognizes the TAC's recommendations mean that the Forest Service is going to have to work differently than it has in the past for the transition to succeed.

Robert Bonnie, under secretary for natural resources and environment with the USDA, said in an interview following the vote that implementation of the recommendations and adding them to the Forest Service's Tongass management plan is the next step.

“We heard ... a lot of interest in implementation, and I think that can begin immediately,” Bonnie said. “(Tongass Forest Supervisor Earl Stewart) and his staff can get together and look at ways that we can begin addressing the concerns that the committee brought up right now. I think that’s something that can begin before the plan amendment comes out. Once the plan amendment, the draft, comes out, there’s going to be more work with this committee (and) with the public at large on responses to that.”

There isn’t a price estimate for implementing the recommendations at this point, according to Bonnie.

“We do have some specific resources we’re looking at now to kind of fill some of those gaps,” he said.

A 32-page draft of the recommendations was available at the Ketchikan meeting, and a finalized document should be published and available within the next week.