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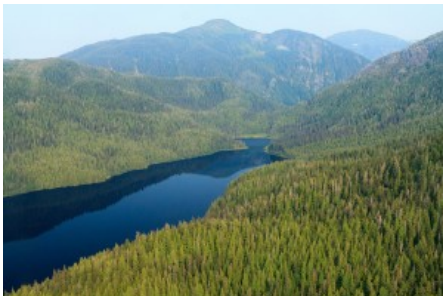
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## USFS chief says no to delay of Tongass timber transition

By [Liz Ruskin, APRN](#) | March 8, 2016

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Aerial view of the Tongass National Forest File photo: Alan Wu

The U.S. Forest Service is working on a controversial plan to shift the timber industry in the Tongass away from old-growth trees. This morning in Washington, Forest Service chief Tom Tidwell said the same thing several different ways: the plan can sustain Southeast Alaska’s timber industry.

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“Without any question, I believe this approach, that over time to transition to the young growth, is the solution for us to be able to continue to provide (for) the integrated wood products industry in Southeast Alaska,” he said.

He faced skeptical questions from Sen. Lisa Murkowski in the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which she chairs. Murkowski pointed out that the Forest Service hasn’t done an inventory of the newer stands, to prove commercial viability.

“So the question this morning is whether the Forest Service will consider postponing this transition until we have a complete young-growth inventory and a financial analysis that are completed in order to determine whether a transition is even feasible?” she asked.

Tidwell, essentially, said no.

“Senator, it’s essential that we move forward and complete the amendment to the forest plan,” he said.

Tidwell is under orders from the Agriculture secretary to expedite the Tongass transition. The Forest Service is working to have an amendment to its Tongass management plan by the end of the year, before time runs out on the Obama administration. Tidwell put it in larger terms.

“Two decades of controversy and litigation around old-growth harvest and roadless (rules), and that’s gotten us nowhere,” he said. He added that the Forest Service is working with stakeholders to develop new markets for the young-growth timber.

“New markets are good, chief, but you still have to have trees that are mature enough to harvest,” Murkowski responded.

Tidwell and Murkowski have had this argument at past hearings, too. He says the Forest Service will continue sales of old growth to serve as “bridge timber” during the transition. The senator told him her constituents on Prince of Wales Island and elsewhere in Southeast believe the plan is unrealistic.

Watching the hearing was another group of Murkowski’s constituents — a small contingent of Southeast Alaska fishermen and guides, organized by Trout Unlimited. They came to Washington seeking protection for 73 areas of the Tongass they say are the most valuable habitat for salmon. Austin Williams, who works for the Alaska branch of Trout Unlimited, says he hopes the Forest Service preserves those areas in its amendment to the Tongass plan, and he doesn’t want the process halted while the government counts and measures the younger timber stands.

“We have an opportunity to get this plan amendment through in a way that provides some protection for high value fish watersheds,” Williams said, after the hearing. “And we shouldn’t delay that out of concern for, you know, the inventory, at this point.”

Trout Unlimited and other conservation groups have been campaigning to protect this collection of watersheds, what they call the Tongass 77, for several years. They haven’t changed the campaign moniker, even after four watersheds on their list were removed from the Tongass in 2014, in the Sealaska land bill.

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continue to provide (for) the integrated wood products industry in Southeast Alaska,”  
What wood products industry in southeast Alaska? The one where the USFS trades unlogged federal lands to the native corp for lands that were dispersed after the Alaska Native claims settlement act in the early 70's.  
Exactly what other integrated wood products industries other than gypo operations are going on in southeast AK? Sounds like BS to me.

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