

# My Turn: Caring for the land and serving the people

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This week, the Tongass Forest Plan amendment, final environmental impact statement and draft record of decision have been released. For the people and communities in or near the Tongass National Forest, this means more sustainable and diverse local economies, some good news amidst Alaska's current fiscal crisis. And for all Americans, it means opportunities to recreate, use its abundant natural resources and experience the bounty of the world's largest temperate rainforest.

The Forest Service's mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Our motto sums this up nicely: caring for the land and serving people. The Forest Service is charged with managing America's forests for the greatest good. The Tongass National Forest is "owned" by all Americans where they can not only make a living, but also enjoy recreation and experience outdoor adventures, fish its abundant salmon streams and explore its untrammeled wilderness.

There are many people that rely on a healthy Tongass for their livelihood and to feed their families — working in the seafood, tourism, mining, timber and energy industries. These sectors are large contributors to Alaska's economy. Many people in rural communities use the fresh, wild bounty of the forests and the sea for subsistence and to engage in traditions that keep them connected to their history and culture.

For many decades, there has been contention over the best use of the Tongass' timber resources amongst its varied user groups. Recognizing the need for collaborative, creative and publicly-owned solutions to forest management, the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) was established in 2014 to advise the agency on the transition to sustainable, young growth forest management that maintains a viable timber industry. Committee members represented a broad and diverse range of viewpoints and expertise, geographically diverse communities in and outside of Alaska, and people with a demonstrated commitment to working on collaborative solutions.

The members of the TAC labored intensely to find suitable compromise amongst the varied user groups. Their efforts culminated in unanimous recommendations adopted as the selected forest plan amendment this week by Tongass Forest Supervisor Earl Stewart. In addition to the TAC recommendations, thousands of public comments directly shaped this amendment.

The amended plan allows for a transition to young growth harvest over the next 15 years, and is intended to alleviate the divisive conflicts over the timber program; stabilize the supply of timber and enable the timber industry to plan with greater confidence; encourage the development of renewable energy projects; and improve habitat conditions for fish and wildlife.

Looking forward, the Forest Service will put our energy into supporting the development of new markets and new products that utilize young growth logs; blaze new trails with ever increasing options for efficient, sustainable energy; support the public in the wise use of the Tongass' enormous bounty brought to the state through the seafood, mining, recreation, tourism, hunting and sport fishing industries; and celebrate the rich cultural traditions on the forest and with Southeast Alaska's diverse communities.

Let's put into place a sustainable plan that serves all Americans present and future. Let's move forward for the greatest good.

To learn more about the Forest Service in Alaska, please go to <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r10/home> or [@AKForestService](#) on Twitter.

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