



Alaska Rainforest Defenders

(formerly the Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community)

KFSK Commentary
September 29, 2017

Is the so-called ‘Good Neighbor Authority’ *good*, or a calamity?

Hi, my name is Becky Knight and I represent the Alaska Rainforest Defenders (formerly GSACC).

Coast Alaska recently aired a news story regarding the new, so-called “Good Neighbor Authority” just implemented by the Forest Service for the Kosciusko timber sale. The national Good Neighbor Authority (or GNA) originated in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Coast Alaska’s story provided a largely positive description of the GNA as seen through the eyes of its industry and State of Alaska supporters. However, the story failed to disclose looming deficiencies many of which even GNA supporters have cited. In short, the GNA will shift sale preparation, administration and oversight of Tongass National Forest timber sales to the State of Alaska and as admitted by those supporters, GNA gets the industry “halfway” toward their goal of privatization of Tongass public lands.

Why is the Good Neighbor Authority deficient? First, the Forest Service should *not* have entered into a GNA agreement with the Department of Natural Resources because DNR lacks critical staff to do the work. In fact, the State Forester previously told the Board of Forestry that the *timber purchaser* will do the Kosciusko timber sale layout and cited the need to contract an out-of-house timber sale administrator because DNR cannot administer the work. That is no way to manage a public forest and is deeply troubling.

Moreover, the Forest Service has been silent on its maladministration of local timber sales disclosed in the agency’s own Washington Office 2016 review, which found that Forest Service personnel failed to provide administrative safeguards necessary to prevent the theft of federal timber, and even provided at least several million dollars in windfalls to one of the Forest Service’s two main customers, Viking Lumber. Perhaps fearing further oversight, the agency is now throwing money toward the State to maintain subsidies for Alcan, an international timber broker who purchased the Kosciusko timber. This makes the waste of federal taxpayer funds harder to trace by dispersing them to the different bureaucracies but does not fix the institutional problems simply by shifting authority from one agency that can’t properly administer public property or taxpayer funds—to another with even less oversight.

Notably, DNR’s Chief Forester says he wants to use the GNA partnership to leverage changes in how the Forest Service manages Tongass second growth. Those changes are contrary to multiple use principles and the purpose of the Good Neighbor Authority, which is to “restore or improve forest, rangeland, and watershed health, including fish and wildlife habitat.”

Instead, he wants clearcutting to be the only means of logging Tongass second growth. Indeed, the Coast Alaska story omitted one of the key results of the federal timber sale — that combined with clearcuts from other timber bureaucracies — that is, University, Sealaska, Mental Health Trust, and State of Alaska lands, the federal timber sale will create contiguous clearcuts of nearly 12,000 acres. The Forest Service and other landowners plan to manage the area like a private tree farm, with short rotations so that forests on Kosciusko will never recover to achieve old-growth habitat conditions. It will be a permanent desert for wildlife, and a free gift of thousands of acres as a tree farm in perpetuity, for timber operators.

Moreover, the Chief Forester also said he wants to weaken resource-protecting standards and guidelines in the Tongass Forest Plan, by changing what he calls the Forest Service's "*philosophy*,".

At the Board of Forestry's spring meeting his example was to eliminate no-cut buffers around classified high-vulnerability karst features, such as sink holes and cave openings. That issue arose because karst terrain is common in the Kosciusko project area. DNR would destroy the Tongass Forest Plan's conservation strategy for wildlife and fish resources.

Finally, in addition to all the roads and bureaucratic expenses, a one million dollar log transfer facility was constructed in Edna Bay that the community did not want. If you are untroubled by impacts to the environment, you *should* be concerned about the vast waste of public money.

Alaska Rainforest Defenders believes that really it is the Department of Natural Resources' philosophy that must change, and the Forest Service shouldn't make more Good Neighbor Authority agreements with taxpayer's money. The Trump administration should fulfill its promise of draining the swamp and audit the Tongass National Forest timber sale program prior to wasting another taxpayer dime here.