

Alaska Rainforest Defenders

A regional environmental organization established in 2011 (formerly GSACC)

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KFSK Commentary

by

Becky Knight



Scenic quality standards deemed acceptable by the Forest Service **prior** to the proposed Forest Service Forest Plan amendment to “relax” visual quality standards for the Central Tongass timber sale. McNamara Point/Zarembo Island. Photo by Becky Knight.

Hi, This is Becky Knight on behalf of the [Alaska Rainforest Defenders](#).

Following, I would like to offer, in two parts—today and tomorrow—more context and background into last week’s KFSK coverage of the Forest Service's

[Central Tongass Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#)¹, or CTP for short. Alaska Rainforest Defenders supports the no-action alternative for this timber sale.

Part One: A Layman's Explanation to the Impacts of the Central Tongass Project and Background

As a recent [KFSK story informed](#), the Forest Service proposes to provide the timber industry with a long-term supply of nearly a quarter billion board feet of primarily old-growth and some second-growth timber, on up to 13,500 acres for the purpose of logging over 15 years. They also intend to approve construction of up to 118 miles of road. The activity would occur on Mitkof, Kupreanof, Kuiu, Wrangell, Zarembo and Etolin Islands and the adjacent mainland on already heavily fragmented landscape. To put this in perspective, this single timber project would log 21 square miles of Tongass public lands which is nearly the size of Manhattan. These acres will be mostly clearcut and converted, in perpetuity, into a tree plantation, with reduced scenic resources and diminished diversity, incapable of supporting robust fish and wildlife populations, upon which we all rely on and treasure.

Make no mistake, the Central Tongass Project **continues** the agency's singular quest to manage Tongass public lands as a subsidized timber colony for [Alcan/Transpac Group](#), an international raw log exporter headquartered in Vancouver, B.C., and [Viking Lumber of Klawock](#). Viking is also a large-scale raw log exporter which does operate a mill but relies largely on raw log exports, particularly high value cedar for what is quite literally its parent corporation in Washington state.

While these two timber barons quietly load the [600 ft. by 100 ft. log freighter "New Face"](#) with unprocessed logs bound for China, they loudly complain to our delegation, especially Senator Murkowski, about the shortage of timber to feed their insatiable appetites. They also protest how the already bargain basement timber stumpage rates are too high, and how more public land *must* be made available to earn them greater profits—called “economic timber” in industry jargon. The quest for economic timber is why almost all SE Alaska timber sales are now concentrated south of Frederick Sound. Any farther away from these two entities base of operations, and it would be too expensive to set up logging camps and transport the logs to their facilities. Consequently, while they are indulged, these lands are being converted into de-facto sacrifice zones for the singular benefit to the industry.

Senator Murkowski is all too happy to oblige her timber friends, while making [quiet trips](#) to SE Alaska to meet with them and apply heavy-handed pressure to the agency to get out the cut—*or else*—the agency budget will be slashed.

¹ Includes links on how to comment

The Forest Service bends to her and their every demand, attempting in a variety of ways to make timber extraction more profitable for them. For instance, packaged with this timber sale is a proposed Forest Plan amendment to "relax" scenic quality standards in order to free up more timber for the industry. This is nothing more than a welfare giveaway to them. The favoritism for the timber industry comes at the expense of every other sustainable use on the Tongass.

In fact, "From 1982-2012 the Forest Service spent \$1.2 **billion** dollars **more** to log the Tongass than it received in timber revenues."² Despite these massive, decades long, public subsidies, the timber industry consistently contributes less than one percent in total employment earnings for Southeast Alaska.³ Moreover, "[i]n terms of workforce earnings, the arts sector is nearly twice the size of the regional timber industry." As analyzed by a former Forest Service Regional economist, during the decade between 2002 to 2012 the annual subsidy amounted to a staggering \$224,000 to \$510,000 per job! What's more, the public pays twice thru both loss of habitat as well as through our hard earned tax dollars. If the environmental impacts do not concern you, the monetary cost should.

In a misguided attempt to circumvent environmental laws for the Central Tongass Project, the Forest Service is using a new, corner-cutting approach for the impact statement that it calls a "condition based" analysis. This methodology does not disclose any site specific information about where actual logging or road construction would take place, making it impossible to evaluate impacts to fish and wildlife populations and personal and subsistence uses. Nor does it provide sufficient information for informed decision-making or informed public participation. It is an analysis method which was attempted during the pulp mill era but roundly rejected by the courts. Now, not later, is the time to do the site specific analysis as required by federal law.

² J. Mehrkens Former R-10 Economist, Scoping Comments for Proposed TLMP Amendment at 2 (June 19, 2014).

³ See Southeast Conference, Southeast Alaska by the Numbers 2017 at 4 (Sept. 2017); Southeast Conference, Southeast Alaska by the Numbers 2016 at 3 (Sept. 2016); Southeast Conference, Alaska by the Numbers 2015 at 4 (Sept. 2015); Southeast Conference, Southeast Alaska by the Numbers 2014 at 4 (Sept. 2014); Southeast Conference, Southeast Alaska by the Numbers 2013 at 4 (Sept. 2013); see also Southeast Conference, The Arts Economy of Southeast Alaska at 1 (Sept. 2014) ("[i]n terms of workforce earnings, the arts sector is nearly twice the size of the regional timber industry").

Following part two tomorrow, the transcript of this commentary will be posted on KFSK's website. The deadline to comment is September 16. Thank you for listening.

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## Alaska Rainforest Defenders

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August 12/13, 2019

Hi-This is Becky Knight again, with Part Two of Alaska Rainforest Defenders briefing on the Forest Service's Central Tongass Project.

### **Part Two: A Layman's Explanation to the Impacts of the Central Tongass Project and Background**

The proposed Central Tongass Project's timber sale—or CTP for short—happens on the heels of two recent, monstrous sized timber projects, on Prince of Wales Island and the Tonka sale on Kupreanof. Moreover, the State of Alaska, University, and the Mental Health Trust have also contributed vast amounts of timber from their local lands to feed Viking and Alcan. This has resulted in a patchwork of fragmented landscapes and significant loss of irreplaceable old growth stands. The conversion of what remains of our great forests into colonial tree plantations, in perpetuity, by Viking and Alcan/Transpac Group comes with the blessing of the Forest Service. For all intents, if the Central Project is approved, the industry will log the “best of the rest” and together with this and past logging, finish off the productivity of these lands.

In an attempt to market support for the CTP the Forest Service has packaged it with various recreation improvements and watershed restoration. Absent is any explanation of how they will provide the funding and other resources needed to complete those projects. But be assured the timber portion is funded. Even if the Forest Service would mitigate some of the harm caused by its past and present mismanagement of southeast Alaska's public lands, the adverse impacts of further federal logging will more than offset any small improvements in fish or wildlife habitat. Restoration projects should not be funded by logging more old growth which ultimately creates a need for yet more restoration. While genuine forest restoration is an admirable intent, there are much better ways to pay for it. Industrial activities associated with the removal of remaining old-growth forest and its replacement with plantation forestry will also render



the central southeast Alaska island shorelines and interior areas undesirable or even inhospitable for visitors from the region and beyond who come for recreation – particularly sport fishing and hunting.

It also makes no sense to push yet another huge timber sale in our region when Pacific salmon marine survival is in a severe downward spiral. Leaving headwater forested watersheds intact could buffer these declines. Salmon need every advantage they can get for reproduction and early survival. The required narrow no-cut stream buffers where salmon spawn often blow down. Instead of secretly meeting with timber industry players last month to devise ways to prop up the industry at any cost, Senator Murkowski should be exploring ways to end and reverse the trend of declining salmon runs.

In 2010 the Forest Service announced a transition away from logging old growth on the Tongass—the last forest in the nation to continue this antiquated and appalling practice. Despite a Forest Plan amendment to that end, there is clearly no sign that that commitment has been honored. The proposed Central Tongass timber sale, and the recently approved Prince of Wales LLA are huge old growth timber sales which demonstrate that the end to old growth logging is not dictated by the Forest Plan or public sentiment but rather by industry—when what remains of the biggest and best old growth have been felled.

A [recent research paper by Headwaters Economics](#) summed up the situation posed by the Tongass timber program and other old growth timber sales similar to the CTP:

*“The allocation of scarce Tongass National Forest budget and staff resources to a minor economic sector represents a large opportunity cost for the regional economy—these resources could be repurposed, ... to larger and more vibrant industries that support more jobs and communities in southeast Alaska.”*

Lastly, and most importantly, the CTP makes no sense during a time when the impacts of climate change have already reached or are about to reach the tipping point. This is the most existential threat to life on Earth that we currently face. The Tongass sequesters more carbon than any other national forest in the nation. It should be allowed to do what it does naturally and at no charge. In fact, last week, the International Panel on Climate Change issued their latest report: [“Climate Change and Land”](#) and concluded,

*“Agriculture, forestry and other types of land use account for 23% of human greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time natural land processes absorb carbon dioxide equivalent to almost a third of carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels and industry.”*

That statement alone should cause all of us to demand that this timber sale be abandoned. Imagine the possibilities if a federal agency were to heed this dire warning by abandoning the CTP and other equally damaging timber projects on the Tongass.

Thank you for listening. The transcript of this two part commentary will be posted on KFSK's website. The deadline to comment<sup>4</sup> is September 16.

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<sup>4</sup> US Forest Service: "Specific written comments may be submitted electronically at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=53098>, or by fax to (907) 772- 5995. Please note the ability to comment at this online address is only activated during a public comment period. Comments may also be mailed to: Carey Case, Project Leader, Petersburg Ranger District, P.O. Box 1328, Petersburg, AK, 99833; or hand-delivered to Petersburg Ranger District, 12 North Nordic Drive, Petersburg, AK 99833 or Wrangell Ranger District, 525 Bennett Street, Wrangell, AK, 99929 during normal business hours, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays."