

Draft EIS Questions & Answers

Q. Why did you prepare this Draft EIS?

- A. In August 2005, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a Decision (*Natural Resources Defense Council, et al., v. United States Forest Service, et al.*, 421 F.3d 797 [9th Cir. 2005]) finding inadequacies primarily relating to the NEPA process for the 1997 Forest Plan. These inadequacies dealt with the timber demand estimates, the range of alternatives related to the timber demand, and the cumulative effects analysis related to activities on non-National Forest System (NFS) lands. The Court asked for an EIS to fix these inadequacies. In addition, the Forest recently completed a 5-year review of the Forest Plan. This review identified a number of items that could lead to adjustments to the Plan.

Q. How is timber demand being addressed?

- A. In 1990, the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station established "planning cycle" projections of Alaska timber product outputs, the derived demand for logs and chips, and timber harvest by owner through trend-based analysis. This analysis was updated in 1994, 1997, and again in 2006. The 2006 projections, *Timber Products Output and Timber Harvest in Alaska: Projections for 2005-2025*, modified the low, medium, and high calculations of the previous documents into four scenarios that essentially make projections for the current underutilized mill capacity situation:

Scenario 1 – Limited Lumber Production-Current Status

Scenario 2 – Expanded Lumber Production-Low

Scenario 3 – Medium Integrated Industry

Scenario 4 – High Integrated Industry

The Forest Plan Amendment Draft EIS evaluates a range of alternatives that fully encompasses these demand scenarios.

Q. How are cumulative effects dealt with in the Draft EIS?

- A. Resource information (on old growth, harvested areas, and roads) has been obtained from the State of Alaska and Sealaska, as well as from satellite imagery and orthophotography on other non-NFS lands. The Draft EIS paints a broader, more comprehensive picture of what is happening in Southeast Alaska on all federal, state, and private lands.

Land Use Designations (LUDs) are zones across the Forest that define the different management prescriptions of the Forest Plan. The timber production, modified landscape, and scenic viewshed LUDs allow timber harvest and road construction and are often referred to as “development LUDs.” Most other LUDs do not permit scheduled timber harvest and are collectively called “non-development LUDs.”

Q. How much of the Tongass National Forest is managed as development LUD?

- A. The Current Forest Plan has about 3.6 million acres in development LUD. The alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIS have development LUD acreages that range from 1.2 million acres to 5.1 million acres.

LUD II is a special land use designation and currently applies to 12 areas identified by the Tongass Timber Reform Act. These areas are to be managed in a roadless state to retain their wildland characteristics, but, unlike wilderness, limited development is permitted, such as some water and power, mining, habitat, and transportation developments (under certain circumstances).

Q. How much of the Tongass National Forest is managed as non-development LUD?

- A. The Current Forest Plan has about 13.2 million acres in non-development LUDs. This includes 5.75 million acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness, and 721,000 acres in Congressionally designated “non-development LUDs” (LUD II), which do not change in any of the alternatives. The alternatives do look at changing the total amount of non-development LUD.

Non-development LUD total acres range from 11.7 million acres to 15.6 million in the alternatives.

Q. Why are you not considering recommending more wilderness in this Draft EIS?

A. The focus of this amendment is to respond to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision. Additional wilderness recommendations are outside the scope of this analysis. Additional wilderness was evaluated in 2003 and a decision was made to not recommend additional areas at that time.

Q. How much timber harvest has already occurred on the Forest?

A. Timber harvesting has occurred on about 453,000 acres since the Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve (forerunner to the Tongass National Forest) was proclaimed by President Theodore Roosevelt on August 20, 1902. About 761,000 acres of the Forest are available for timber harvest under the 1997 Tongass Land Management Plan Revision.

Q. How did you handle scoping for this project?

A. We looked at public input from more than 10 years of planning efforts, including site-specific analyses on ranger districts, the Tongass Land Management Plan Revision of 1997, the 2003 SEIS for Wilderness Evaluation and the national Roadless Initiative. Many individuals, interest groups, tribal and other governmental agencies, and Congress have expressed interest in the management of the Forest. We established a Forest Plan Adjustment Web Site in January 2006 and invited people to send us comments about the process. In March of 2006 we issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement. Discussions with groups and individuals and consulting with tribal governments have been ongoing.

With release of the Draft EIS and Proposed Forest Plan in January of 2007 we began a 90-day formal comment period. More than 20 public meetings will be held in various Alaska communities, along with an internet-based meeting.

Q. What issues did you identify?

A. **Key Issue 1** – Protection of high value roadless areas from road development and timber harvest activity on the Tongass National Forest is of local and national importance, particularly for wildlife and biodiversity, recreation, and tourism.

Key Issue 2 – The Tongass National Forest needs to provide a sufficient timber supply to meet the market demand and help maintain a vibrant economy in Southeast Alaska.

Key Issue 3 – Protection of the wildlife habitat and biodiversity of the Tongass National Forest is of local and national significance and is affected by road development and timber harvest activities.

Q. What alternatives did you develop and analyze in the Draft EIS?

A. **Alternative 1** - Under this alternative, forest management would provide a mix of National Forest uses and activities, but would give much additional emphasis to maintaining inventoried roadless areas, associated fish and wildlife values, and unroaded recreation, tourism, and subsistence opportunities, relative to the current Forest Plan. Timber would be managed primarily within the roaded land base and the vast majority of inventoried roadless areas would remain in a natural condition.

Alternative 2 - Under this alternative, forest management would provide a mix of National Forest uses and activities, but would give additional emphasis to roadless areas, associated fish and wildlife values, and unroaded recreation, tourism, and subsistence opportunities, relative to the current Forest Plan. Timber would be managed within the roaded land base as well as within roadless areas with lower wilderness attribute ratings (primarily those adjacent to developed areas). The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition.

Alternative 3 - Under Alternative 3, forest management would provide a mix of National Forest uses and activities, but would give some additional emphasis to roadless areas, associated fish and wildlife values, and unroaded recreation, tourism, and subsistence opportunities, relative to the current Forest Plan.

Timber would be managed within the roaded land base as well as within additional roadless areas; but these additional areas would not include any of the high value roadless areas identified in the 1999 Record of Decision (USDA Forest Service 1999) as the 18 Areas of Special Interest, nor the 23 areas proposed for wilderness in H.R. 987. The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition.

Alternative 4 - Under Alternative 4, forest management would provide a mix of National Forest uses and activities, but would give additional emphasis to timber management and associated economic stability of Southeast Alaska communities, relative to the current Forest Plan. Timber would be managed within an area expanded beyond the current Forest Plan. The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition; however, the majority of roadless areas that contain substantial productive old growth, outside of wilderness, would be developed.

Alternative 5 - This is the No Action alternative. It represents a continuation of the current Forest Plan and would result in a mix of National Forest uses and activities. Timber would be managed in an area more extensive than under Alternative 3, but less extensive than under Alternative 4. The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition; however, the majority of roadless areas that contain substantial productive old growth, outside of wilderness, would be partially developed.

Alternative 6 - This is the Proposed Action alternative. It is very similar to the Alternative 5 (No Action) alternative in terms of LUD allocations; however, it includes refinements to the boundaries of a number of Small Old Growth reserves, new Geologic Special Interest Areas, a new Experimental Forest, the conversion of a large area of Remote Recreation LUD north of Juneau to Semi-Remote Recreation, and other minor LUD refinements. It also would include an ongoing interagency process of refining Small Old-Growth reserve boundaries that will produce additional refinements. Timber would be managed in an area more extensive than under Alternative 3, but less extensive than under Alternative 4. The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition; however, the majority of roadless areas that contain substantial productive old growth, outside of wilderness, would be partially developed.

Alternative 7 - Under Alternative 7, forest management would provide a mix of National Forest uses and activities, but would give much additional emphasis to timber management, relative to the current Forest Plan. Timber would be managed on a considerably expanded land base compared with the current Forest Plan. The vast majority of current roadless areas would remain in a natural condition; however, the majority of roadless areas that contain substantial productive old growth, outside of wilderness, would be fully developed.

Q. How is the Draft EIS affected by the Roadless Rule litigation?

A. The latest court ruling still finds that the Tongass is exempt from the Roadless Rule. Of course roadless areas are still a major issue and the Draft EIS covers in detail how the alternatives affect inventoried roadless areas.

Q. The public comment period is required to be 90 days. Are you going to extend the comment period?

A. No. We believe that 90 days is an adequate amount of time to study the documents and submit comments. Much of the material related to proposed changes to the Forest Plan and alternative descriptions has been on the web site since last summer. The Draft EIS and Proposed Plan are also available on the Web site.

Q. Many believe that without wilderness designation, all the old-growth forests of the Tongass will be harvested. How many acres of old growth are scheduled for harvest and isn't much of the old growth at low elevations already gone?

A. The Tongass has over 9 million acres of old-growth forest, of which over 5 million acres are commercial-sized trees. The current Forest Plan schedules approximately 480,000 acres of that to be harvested. About 3 million acres of productive old growth below 800 feet elevation remain on the Tongass National Forest.

Q. What's my role as an interested citizen?

A. Read the materials carefully. Discuss your interests with others. Review the Tongass Draft EIS Web site (www.tongass-fpadjust.net). Then write us a

thoughtful email or letter, submit an on-line comment, or fill out a Comment Form telling us how you think specific areas should be managed; providing us with new information we didn't consider; and/or offering suggestions for how you think our final decision should turn out. Be specific and detailed. We know that many people will support one alternative over another. We're not counting votes with this process – we're looking for substantive input that will help us make informed decisions.

Q. Where can I find more information on the Amendment?

- A. We developed a Web site specific to the Amendment to provide background information on the project, an explanation of the planning process we are following, maps, and other background information. We continually update information on the Web site as it is developed, including posting copies of draft documents and maps. Our goal for the Web site is to provide you the opportunity to follow along with us as information is updated. The Web site also provides a convenient way for you to formally comment on the Draft EIS and Proposed Forest Plan.

The Draft EIS Web site (www.tongass-fpadjust.net) is linked to the main Forest Service Alaska Region Web page at www.fs.fed.us/r10 and the main Tongass National Forest Web page at www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass.

Q. How do I comment?

- A. We really want your comments. We would prefer that you go to the Web site at: www.tongass-fpadjust.net and send us an email or fill out the comment form that goes directly to our database. You can also send us a letter or fill out and submit a Comment Form at one of the open houses or hearings being held throughout Southeast Alaska and Anchorage.

Please mail written comments to:

**USDA FS Tongass NF
Federal Building
648 Mission Street
Ketchikan AK 99901**

Tongass Statistics

Tongass National Forest Information		
Category	Acres (000)	% of Tongass NF
Tongass National Forest, total	16,771	100
Wildernesses (19)	5,749	34
Inventoried Roadless Areas (115) (Includes 721,000 acres of TTRA legislated LUD II.)	9,521	57
Other Tongass National Forest Land	1,501	9
Non-forested Land (rock, ice, muskeg, lakes, etc.)	6,672	40
Forested Land	10,009	60
<p>Significant debate has occurred concerning timber harvest activity on the Tongass National Forest. The following displays percentages of the Tongass affected by timber harvest activity, including road construction.</p>		
Total area in which timber harvest is considered (Development LUDs)	3,620	22
Roadless acres	2,443	15
Currently roaded	1,177	7
Total area on which trees would be harvested (scheduled acres)	702	4
Total area on which trees would be harvested in Roadless	380	2