

Tongass proposal up for public comment

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KETCHIKAN — The U.S. Forest Service is seeking feedback from the public on a proposal that could change how the Tongass National Forest is managed over the next 10 to 15 years.

The proposed land and resource management plan and draft environmental impact statement includes several plans meant to simplify the transition from old-growth to young-growth timber, said Forest Supervisor Earl Stewart. The Ketchikan Daily News reported Saturday.

In a Nov. 16 letter to participants in the planning process, Stewart said that amending the 2008 Forest Plan “is needed to accelerate the transition to a young-growth forest management program, and to do so in a way that preserves a viable timber industry that provides jobs and opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska.”

The transition to young-growth timber is a mandate from federal agricultural officials to make the Tongass National Forest more “ecologically, socially and economically sustainable,” according to Stewart’s letter.

The Forest Service, with the proposed amendment, remains committed to supporting the southeast Alaska logging industry, according to Stewart. The amendment, which also includes a renewable energy component, seeks to recognize other areas of southeast Alaska, like fishing, Stewart added.

“The TAC (Tongass Advisory Committee) did an amazing job in looking at challenges (related to the transition) and representing diverse groups,” he said.

However, switching to young-growth trees, which are not as valuable for the timber industry as old-growth, will present a challenge, Stewart said.

“There are a lot of questions yet to be resolved, but (the proposed amendment is) a step forward to get to a better understanding,” he said.

The Forest Service will hold public meeting in several different communities during the 90-day public comment period.

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