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New Plan for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska Perpetuates Old Challenges, Offers Potential Opportunity

*Forest Service keeps open to logging most of the coastal rainforest's
high-value and biologically important areas, but adopts phased implementation*

The Bush administration today announced its decision on a court-ordered revision of its management plan for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. The decision embraces a new, phased approach to logging in the country's largest national forest, but does not stop the controversial pattern of leaving the most ecologically and culturally important lands open to logging.

"Postponing logging in some of the most valuable places within the Tongass is a step in the right direction, but unfortunately it doesn't solve problems in the long run," said Laurie Cooper, Rainforest Program Director of the Alaska Wilderness League. "This may provide some breathing room and time for people to work through differences. In the meantime, there is bound to be continued uncertainty over what will happen to the special places upon which people and communities depend and that make the Inside Passage a world-renowned destination."

The Forest Service's reluctance to initiate bold change in the Tongass runs counter to the overwhelming public support nationwide for conserving this one-of-a-kind forest. The Tongass is the only forest in the nation where logging is allowed in roadless, intact watersheds.

"Americans, whether or not they've ever had the privilege of visiting Southeast Alaska, feel a connection with the Tongass and all it represents," said Kristen Miller, Legislative Director of the Alaska Wilderness League. "There's a strong belief around the country and in the halls of Congress that we should be better stewards of our largest national forest."

For decades logging in the Tongass has been synonymous with conflict and controversy. It is likely that what amounts to a "the more you log, the more you get" management plan will ultimately fall flat with the American public. Lasting resolution of the Tongass impasse will require a balanced approach that sustains local communities, provides permanent and durable protection of high-value, intact watersheds and restores biologically important forest lands which have already been damaged by logging and road construction.

"Permanently protecting these irreplaceable national lands and sustaining local communities is the best way forward," said Cooper. "The League believes it is possible to work together to put old conflicts to rest, find some common ground, and craft a new approach which delivers results for everyone who depends upon and values the Tongass National Forest."



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About Alaska Wilderness League – Your Land. Your Voice.

Alaska Wilderness League's mission is to lead the effort to preserve Alaska's wilderness by engaging citizens, sharing resources, collaborating with other organizations, educating the public, and providing a courageous, constant and victorious voice for Alaska in the nation's capital. It is the only organization dedicated solely to the preservation of Alaska's wilderness in the nation's capital. For more information visit: www.alaskawild.org.

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