

For Immediate Release

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Conservation Groups Applaud Forest Service's Course Change on the Tongass National Forest

Federal Agency's Decision to Shift Logging to Second-Growth and Emphasize Job Creation Comes as Welcome News for Southeast Alaska

(Anchorage and Juneau, Alaska, May 27, 2010) -- Trout Unlimited Alaska, Audubon Alaska and the Alaska Wilderness League today welcomed an announcement by the U.S. Forest Service that the federal agency is shifting logging in the Tongass National Forest from old-growth stands to forested areas that have already been harvested and cut with roads.

At nearly 17 million acres, the Tongass in Southeast Alaska is both the country's largest national forest and one of the biggest intact tracts of temperate rainforest in the world. For several decades beginning in the 1950s, loggers supplying two now-defunct pulp mills cut thousands of acres of Tongass hemlock, spruce and cedar trees. Tongass logging sparked one of the nation's most intractable and controversial environmental battles, pitting the timber industry and its supporters against conservationists, fishermen, tourism operators and others.

Wednesday's announcement that the Forest Service will chart a new course for the Tongass, moving timber sales from pristine old-growth into areas already impacted by logging is welcome news for groups like Trout Unlimited Alaska (TU-AK) and Alaska Wilderness League which have long worked for a negotiated end to the timber wars.

"It's a huge step forward. The decision recognizes that a development plan focused almost exclusively on road building and logging in road-free areas of the Tongass and cutting down old growth is not a recipe for economic success in Southeast Alaska. The agency has finally recognized that while logging can and will be a component of the regional economy, it is not the prime mover for the agency anymore. For the first time, the Forest Service is truly looking at all the resources that can help create a thriving economic environment and good jobs and income for people. We're excited to work with the Forest Service and stakeholders from throughout the region to make this a reality," said Tim Bristol, director of TU-AK.

The Forest Service also announced that it will emphasize job creation in emerging and established industries in Southeast Alaska, including forest restoration, renewable energy, tourism, recreation, subsistence, commercial and sport fishing and mariculture. The Forest Service described this effort as a "region-wide job creation platform."

While the groups applauded the Forest Service's new approach to Tongass management, calling it a long overdue response to the region's economic realities and the ecological needs of the forest, they also recognized the ongoing need for durable, legislated protection of important fish and wildlife habitat. They look forward to working closely with the Forest Service to support the agency as it implements its new approach.

"It's exciting to be able to support the conservation of important fish and wildlife habitat and partner with the Forest Service and local communities to get the needed investments into the region that can spark job creation across the many sectors of our economy," said Laurie Cooper, Rainforest Director of Alaska Wilderness League.

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