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Forest Service fails to receive bids for outdated Tongass National Forest timber sale

Juneau, Alaska: Yesterday, the Tongass National Forest received good news as the U.S. Forest Service failed to receive any bids on a project to log old-growth trees in priority salmon watersheds on southeast Alaska's Kuiu Island. Southeast Alaska's economy has already transitioned away from timber, and is now being driven by sustainable industries like tourism and fishing that rely on a healthy Tongass National Forest.

The Kuiu Island sale was predicated on nearly decade-old analysis and public input, and yet the Forest Service proceeded even as new protections for these very same lands are being finalized as part of the Tongass Land Management Plan amendment (TLMP). Two actions taken by the Forest Service made the Kuiu Island sale bid process possible. First, the agency paid for nearly all road construction and reconstruction at public expense, shifting cost from logger to taxpayer. Second, the sale was approved for 100 percent export, increasing the value of the timber for the logger but also ensuring that the small economic benefits of – and jobs associated with – destructive logging activities would largely by-pass the local economy. Shifting expenses to the taxpayer and exporting the logged timber overseas was the only way the Forest Service was able to offer this sale with positive value.

The Tongass Advisory Committee, a diverse group of local stakeholders organized as part of the TLMP process, has already recommended that high-value watersheds (including those at issue here on Kuiu Island) be placed off-limits to old-growth logging. North Kuiu is still in relatively good shape despite previous logging, and has become a growing destination for tourism, recreation, hunting and fishing.

Statement by Dan Kirkwood, Rainforest Campaign Manager at Alaska Wilderness League:

“Hopefully this lack of bids is a wake-up call. Southeast Alaska's economy has moved beyond the clear-cuts of the past. We need the Forest Service to keep its commitment to protect places with abundant salmon, to move beyond the old ways and instead focus on supporting our diverse economy.

The Kuiu Island timber sale would have directly impacted high-value salmon watersheds in the Tongass. Wild salmon rely on healthy freshwater streams to lay eggs and act as nurseries for baby salmon. Abundant salmon and wildlife is part of what makes the Tongass a world-class tourism and fishing destination.

The Forest Service should follow through on its commitment to protect these watersheds. Moving forward with the Kuiu sale would contradict the Forest Service's own draft forest plan, the voices of



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thousands of Alaskans, not to mention the recommendation of the Tongass Advisory Committee which unanimously identified these and other high-value watersheds in the Tongass as areas where logging should not be allowed to occur.

North Kuiu is already working for Southeast Alaskans. The Forest Service should not move forward with these kinds of destructive and outdated sales.”

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