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Ninth Circuit upholds Big Thorne timber sale in Tongass National Forest

Controversial timber sale would devastate wildlife, as well as billion-dollar fishing and tourism industries

WASHINGTON – Yesterday, a three-judge panel on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld the controversial Big Thorne timber sale. The Big Thorne sale would clear-cut more than 6,000 acres of old-growth rainforest on Prince of Wales Island in the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Service estimates the sale would cost taxpayers \$13 million, however, the economics of recent sales indicate taxpayer costs could eventually climb to more than \$100 million. The Forest Service has been widely criticized for offering old-growth sales at an economic loss to American taxpayers. Timber makes up less than 1 percent of economic activity in southeast Alaska.

Big Thorne is by far the largest Tongass old-growth sale in decades, and would undercut southeast Alaska's billion-dollar fishing and tourism industries. It would also damage vital habitat for salmon, bears, Sitka black-tailed deer, goshawks and the Alexander Archipelago wolf, and impact sport and subsistence hunters as well as recreational use of the forest. This sale, coupled with proposed legislation that would privatize or log millions of acres in southeast Alaska, represent an unsustainable and damaging approach to managing America's public lands for future generations.

The Ninth Circuit decision is currently under review.

Statement by Kristen Miller, Interim Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

"Allowing Big Thorne is a terrible blow to the Tongass National Forest and southeast Alaska. Southeast Alaska's economy has moved on from timber, where a wild and healthy Tongass is already supporting robust and sustainable recreation, tourism and fishing industries that together pump approximately \$2 billion annually into the region's economy.

Conserving the Tongass means ensuring confidence in the jobs we already get from the forest, and the common thread behind the success of the recreation, tourism and fishing industries in southeast is a healthy, vibrant and intact Tongass. Continuing to subsidize massive sales like Big Thorne threatens the viability of the wildlife and scenery that bring 1 million people to hike, hunt, fish, kayak and tour the Tongass each year.

Instead of wasting millions of tax dollars per year on large old-growth timber sales slated for export, we should put our taxpayer dollars where they will give us the largest return on our investment year after year, and allow us to preserve one of the largest remaining temperate rainforests in the world in the process."

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