

For Immediate Release

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Alaskans Challenge Old Growth Timber Sale in Tongass National Forest

Kuiu Timber Sale would harm local businesses, wildlife

Juneau, AK – Local conservation and business interests represented by Earthjustice sued the U.S. Forest Service today to stop an old-growth timber sale on Kuiu Island in the Tongass National Forest. The lawsuit, filed in federal district court in Alaska, says the Forest Service’s environmental analysis is 11 years old and fails to consider new threats from the proposed 13.6 million board foot sale on North Kuiu Island. The sale could wipe out 523 acres of old growth forest.

North Kuiu Island has become a recreational hotspot, and the timber sale would injure regional economic interests. “The passenger capacity for the small cruise ship fleet in Southeast Alaska has more than doubled since 2011 and is still expanding by adding vessels, new itineraries and expanding seasons to meet market demand for the southeast Alaskan wilderness experience,” said **Hunter McIntosh, President of The Boat Company**. “Almost all of these vessels operate along northern and central southeast Alaska marine travel routes that require access to North Kuiu Island.”

Small cruise vessels bring hundreds of visitors to the island every year, where they take part in kayaking, hiking, beachcombing and other recreational activities, and provide business to local merchants as they pass through the region. Logging would happen in sight of Kuiu’s popular bays, bring industrial traffic, and create a visible landscape of clear-cuts that would take the island off tour itineraries for years.

“Southeast Alaska’s economy has moved beyond the clear-cuts of the past, and Kuiu Island is an example of that shift,” said **Andy Moderow, Alaska Director for Alaska Wilderness League**. “Beautiful wilderness and abundant salmon and wildlife are what makes the Tongass a world-class tourism and fishing destination. So why are we talking about greenlighting clear-cuts in clear sight of popular tourist routes on an island that is home to high-value salmon watersheds? Kuiu Island is already working for Southeast Alaskans. The Forest Service should not move forward with these kinds of destructive and outdated sales.”

The proposed sale would damage the environment. Recent scientific analyses show that the populations of deer, black bear, and marten on the island are declining alarmingly and in ways that can be traced to Kuiu’s legacy of old growth logging.

"Additional logging of Kuiu Island’s irreplaceable old-growth forest will destroy essential habitat for marten, deer, and black bears. In proposing this sale based on a woefully outdated analysis, the Forest Service is ignoring significant recent information showing significant declines in all three species on Kuiu Island. It’s time for the U.S. Forest Service to move away from controversial and costly industrial-scale old-growth timber sales and instead focus on restoration of wildlife habitat and watersheds,” said **Pete Nelson, Director of Federal Lands at Defenders of Wildlife**.

“It is high time for the Forest Service to respect all the ways that modern Alaskans depend on the Tongass, not just logging,” said **Erin Whalen, one of the Earthjustice attorneys** who represents groups in the case. “We won’t let the agency turn a blind eye to the sale’s serious economic, social, and environmental costs in the name of satisfying timber quotas.”

Though this project has been in the works for more than a decade, the Forest Service has never sold any of the timber because the economics didn't work. No logger could sell the timber for more than it cost to cut the trees down and transport them. The new sale proposed by the U.S. Forest Service is still unprofitable, but the Forest Service sweetened the deal for private loggers by shifting much of the cost to U.S. taxpayers. The agency funded nearly all the road construction needed for the sale.

"The Forest Service just seems like it is stuck in the past," says **Buck Lindekugel, Grassroots Attorney for the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council**. "Spending over \$3 million of taxpayer dollars to build roads for the loggers, and then allowing them to export all the logs without any local manufacture, makes no economic sense given the timber industry makes up less than 1 percent of the region's economy today. American taxpayers aren't going to let the agency keep getting away with this type of corporate welfare much longer."

The Forest Service also approved the sale for 100 percent export — increasing immediate value for the logger but reducing the local economic benefit of the sale.

"It's disturbing that the Forest Service wants to resurrect this destructive timber sale that would harm wildlife and the local economy," said **Marc Fink, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity**. "The agency continues to undervalue the tremendous importance of the remaining old-growth forests on the Tongass for wildlife, recreation and mitigating climate change."

"We will not allow the Trump administration to harm local businesses and wildlife in a reckless effort to liquidate natural treasures that belong to Alaskans and to all Americans—squandering taxpayer dollars and our kids' heritage," said **Niel Lawrence, a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council**.

Earthjustice filed the lawsuit on behalf of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, The Boat Company, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Alaska Wilderness League, Alaska Rainforest Defenders, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. It says the Forest Service's conclusion that "[n]o new information would affect the original decision or warrant additional analysis" is unreasonable and unlawful for several reasons, including:

- The sale's decreased local economic benefits caused by the Forest Service's changed export policy;
- The increased public cost of the sale, which is more than fifteen times what the Forest Service expects loggers to bid;
- Harm to local tourism businesses that rely on North Kuiu; and
- Threats to Kuiu Island's dwindling wildlife populations.

The Forest Service failed to evaluate, in a supplemental environmental impact statement, whether the high environmental, social, and economic costs of the sale could be justified in light of the increased cost to taxpayers and the decreased economic benefit of the sale.

[Read the release online](#)

[Read the legal document](#)

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