



File Code: 1570 **SEP 24 2009**
Date:

Mr. Andrew Thoms
Executive Director
Sitka Conservation Society
Box 6533
Sitka, AK 99835

Dear Mr. Thoms:

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.18(b)(1), I have reviewed the administrative record for the Logjam Timber Sale Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD). The Tongass Forest Supervisor signed the ROD. I have also considered the Appeal Reviewing Officer's (ARO) recommendation (enclosed) regarding the disposition of your appeal (Appeal #09-10-00-0009 A215). The ARO recommended that the Forest Supervisor's decision be affirmed.

Decision

I concur with the ARO's recommendation and affirm the Forest Supervisor's decision, with instructions as specified below. Your requested relief is denied.

Management of the Tongass National Forest has long been contentious. In recent years, however, great strides have been taken to bring all interested parties together in a collaborative search for common ground through the Tongass Futures Roundtable (TFR). One of the central goals of TFR has been to accelerate the transition of the timber program on the Tongass from one based on harvesting old-growth forest stands to one that focuses on areas harvested decades ago, when harvest methods were not nearly as protective of other natural resources as current practices are.

These efforts fit very well with the vision for the Forest Service that was articulated recently by Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack in his speech in Seattle. The Secretary envisions a future in which the agency's efforts are focused on restoration of the health and resilience of forest ecosystems and the rural economies that depend on them. In short, the Secretary is calling the Forest Service to work more collaboratively to improve community health and wealth in rural America.

The Secretary also noted that, in some parts of the western United States, these efforts are hampered by the deterioration—indeed, in some cases the disappearance—of the infrastructure needed for a restoration economy. With so few mills remaining in some areas, it is even more difficult to conduct the type of restoration activities that are so essential to enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems to threats associated with climate change, such as invasive species and wildfires.

In Southeast Alaska, we have an opportunity to prevent that situation from occurring, but only if



we act promptly to retain the few remaining timber operators. As I stated in the Record of Decision for the 2008 Tongass Forest Plan Amendment, if we fail to make sufficient economical timber volume available to the remaining timber industry in Southeast Alaska in the next few years, there will be no industry available to conduct restoration activities when young-growth forest stands become more available for harvest in future decades.

These are the factors that compel me to make the decision I am making today. It would be tragic, however, if this decision had a negative effect on future collaborative efforts to find consensus regarding where to continue active management of the Tongass. These collaborative efforts will continue to be essential to development of a diverse restoration economy in Southeast Alaska focused on enhancing ecological, social, and economic resiliency of the area we all love so well.

Accordingly, while I affirm the Forest Supervisor's decision on the Logjam Timber Sale, I instruct him to do the following:

- As timber sale project(s) are implemented from the Logjam Timber Sale FEIS/ROD, consider mitigating effects by modifying road standards (specified roads to temporary roads with closure upon completion of project), modifying harvest prescriptions (even aged management to individual tree removal where feasible), and deferring harvest in key wildlife corridors if other vegetative treatments in previously harvested areas have not occurred or are not scheduled to occur prior to implementation of the Logjam decision. Any deviation from the Logjam decision should follow Forest Service directives and NEPA to determine whether further environmental analysis is required.
- Continue to place emphasis on preparing young-growth projects for implementation in all Land Use Designations that allow this type of activity to occur, to determine their feasibility in off-setting conventional timber harvest. Immediately focus resources to developing young-growth projects and conducting environmental analysis of them so that interest in these projects can begin to be determined.
- The Tongass has made major milestones in furthering the collaborative efforts associated with vegetation management. In light of this work, consider developing a process whereby interest groups can become involved in the initial phases of long-term planning for both conventional timber sales and young growth projects. As well, determine through this process whether or not stewardship type contracts could be utilized to achieve multiple objectives with multi-resource environmental analysis documents.

My decision incorporates, by reference, the entire administrative record, which includes the appeal and project planning records, and constitutes the final administrative decision of the Department of Agriculture [36 CFR 215.18(c)]. The ROD may be implemented 15 days following the date of this decision [36 CFR 215.9(b)].

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis E. Bschor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

DENNIS E. BSCHOR
Regional Forester

Enclosure

cc: Forrest Cole, Jason C Anderson