



NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service

Alaska Region

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Regional Forester reconfirms Chugach National Forest wilderness and sustains Tongass National Forest protection

JUNEAU, Alaska- The USDA Forest Service Regional Forester for Alaska released his decision today for the continued protection of the wildlands contained in the Tongass and Chugach national forests. Regional Forester Denny Bschor, along with Tongass Forest Supervisor Tom Puchlerz and Acting Chugach Forest Supervisor Susan Rutherford, released the status of the wilderness recommendation for the Chugach and details of the Tongass Wilderness Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

Bschor reconfirmed the Forest Service's commitment to the importance of wildlands when he announced the agency was submitting the Chugach Forest Plan's wilderness recommendation for the Nellie Juan/College Fiord area to the current Congress. Bschor said, "This will be the first Wilderness recommendation sent to Congress by any Administration since 1984." The Tongass Record of Decision, signed by Bschor, keeps more than 90 percent of the 17-million-acre Tongass in a wildland status, and recommends no more wilderness.

Rutherford said, "I'm very excited at the prospect of designated wilderness in Prince William Sound. If enacted by Congress, these 1.4 million acres will be the very first designated wilderness on the second largest national forest in the country. This area will be a spectacular addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System."

"An area twice the size of Maryland is wildland on the Tongass today," said Bschor. "Many people voiced opinions concerning timber harvesting. Under the Forest Plan, timber management will continue on 4% of the Tongass National Forest."

Public input and consultation was invaluable and almost unprecedented in scope for both the Tongass and Chugach planning processes according to Puchlerz and Rutherford.

"Since private land is very scarce in Southeast Alaska, communities need the opportunity to use national forest lands to develop basic public infrastructure such as power lines, water supplies and transportation systems," said Puchlerz. "This Record of Decision provides that opportunity."

"By our actions today we are guaranteeing that our grandchildren will have virtually the same Alaska national forests to visit and use that we have today," Bschor said. "It goes to the heart of the Forest Service's mission- 'Caring for the Land and Serving People'."

More detailed information concerning the Chugach wilderness proposal and the Tongass Wilderness SEIS can be found at www.tongass-seis.net, www.fs.fed.us/r10 or www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach

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Fact Sheet on Tongass SEIS Record of Decision

As a result of this decision, more than 90% of the 17-million-acre Tongass National Forest will continue to be wildlands.

After 100 years of management, more than 90% of the Tongass, an area twice the size of Maryland, is wildlands today.

Under the Forest Plan, timber management will continue on 4% of the Tongass National Forest.

This decision provides local communities the opportunity to develop basic public facilities such as power lines, water supplies and transportation systems on national forest lands. That is important because private land is very scarce.

We received 175,000 comments on this proposal containing valuable information that assisted us in making this decision.

The Forest Service provided 100 years of conservation and effective forest health management, and our efforts will continue through the next century.

In 50 years, under the current plan, 87% of the Tongass will still be roadless and in wildlands.

Social and economic sectors today are still dependent on the Tongass for natural resources to maintain communities and rural subsistence lifestyles mandated by ANILCA.

Almost 33% of the 6.6 million acres of congressionally protected acres (Wilderness, Monuments, and LUD II areas) are old-growth forests of spruce, cedar and hemlock.

Wildlife and fish—such as brown bears, gray wolves, bald eagles and five salmon species—are found in the Tongass and Chugach forest and waters in abundance. Many species that thrive here are rare or endangered in other states.

The Roadless Rule is a separate process from this decision. The Forest Service Washington Office is leading that process.

145 million board feet of timber will become available this year. Four sales currently under contract, but enjoined until after 45 days of this decision, contain 65 million board feet of timber, and another 80 million board feet will be offered in other sales.

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Fact Sheet on Chugach Wilderness Recommendation

We are reconfirming our commitment to the importance of wilderness with the Chugach Forest Plan decision to recommend Nellie Juan/College Fiord as a wilderness area. The Administration will submit this proposal to Congress.

The Nellie Juan-College Fiord area is a world-class treasure located near Anchorage. Its natural beauty features landscapes of rugged snowcapped mountains, large glaciers, ancient forests, wetlands and muskegs, and clear marine waters

The proposed wilderness area represents about 25 % of the 5.5 million acre Chugach National Forest and is more than twice the size of Rhode Island.

When approved by Congress, it would be the first designated wilderness in the Chugach National Forest.

ANILCA (1980) created the 2 million acre Nellie Juan College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. Our 1984 forest plan supported this designation.

Recently, the Whittier road has been completed which opens western Prince William Sound to public access. To accommodate expected increased public use of the area and to accommodate private land interests within the area, we reduced the acreage by about 100,000 from the original Nellie Juan-College Fiord proposal to provide a variety of recreational uses. The land no longer included in the wilderness proposal will be protected with a "backcountry" land use prescription.