

Tongass National Forest Forest Plan 5-Year Review

PETERSBURG PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

1.0 Introduction

The Tongass National Forest (TNF) is operating under the 2008 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Forest Plan (Forest Plan). As promised when the plan was completed, a five-year review is now occurring to determine whether any actions are needed to clarify or adjust the plan.

Petersburg District Ranger Jason Anderson and Tongass Forest Planner Sue Jennings hosted a public meeting at the Petersburg Indian Association on February 11, 2013, from 6:00-8:00 pm. The public meeting objectives are to help the public understand the Forest Plan 5-year review process; provide information to help the public prepare effective comments; and provide an opportunity to ask questions or provide comments. Jason Anderson provided an overview of the five-year review process, and presented a PowerPoint reviewing the Forest Plan and what will occur during and following the comment period.

In addition to the TNF team, there were 12 meeting attendees, seven of whom provided public comments.

2.0 Clarifying Questions and Answers

This section summarizes the clarifying questions and responses discussed at the meeting.

Conservation Strategy

Will there be an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the draft Conservation Strategy, after the different conservation strategies are compared, before it is finalized?

- Answer: There are no plans for a public comment period at this time; if that is desired ask for this in a comment.

Funding

Is the Petersburg Ranger District being adequately funded to fulfill its mission?

- Answer: No. There are major things we cannot do within the current budget. Three examples are facilities management, general administration, and heritage.

Climate Change Research

What is happening with climate change research?

- Answer: The Forest Service is looking at the available science. The Forest Service also has a branch that conducts scientific research, and, rangers take requests from researchers to do climate change studies on the Forest. Invasive species inventories are being as kept up to date as funding allows.

Transfer of Federal Land to State

Are there any more areas of the Tongass being looked at for transfer to State Forest?

- Answer: There is a recommendation from the Timber Task Force for this to happen, but at this point, it is a recommendation only. Also there are 40,000 acres in remaining entitlement to the state from the statehood act.

Change in Comment Period

Point of Information: Senator Murkowski's office has asked for three-month extension of comment period (through June). This is being considered by Chief Tidwell.

3.0 Comment Summary (*grouped by topic*)

This section summarizes the formal comments offered by individuals at the meeting.

Concern Regarding Reduced Deer Population and Level of Harvest on Mitkof Island and Lindenberg Peninsula (four commenters)

- Timber sales have been contrary to the USFS Conservation Strategy.
- The deer population on Mitkof Island and Lindenberg Peninsula has declined substantially due to clearcuts. Mitkof Island was the "bread-basket" for area residents; subsistence deer and other food is significantly reduced now, and is farther away and more dangerous to harvest as a consequence.
- Deer require connected old growth stands for winter feeding and safety.
- Clearcutting on Mitkof Island and the Lindenberg Peninsula needs to be ended to bring deer populations back.

Petersburg Creek should become a Remote LUD (three commenters) and the Wild & Scenic River Corridor should continue

- When the Forest Plan was revised before, Petersburg Creek was owned by Alaska Mental Health Trust, now it is Forest Service land and there is a desire to safeguard Petersburg Creek for the benefit of the community by designating an appropriate LUD.
- Petersburg Creek LUD should be changed from Scenic to Remote (or Wilderness), and the Wild and Scenic River Designation recommendation to

Congress should continue for the length of the Creek. The public would like to be able to comment on these determinations.

The highest economic use of the Tongass has shifted from the timber industry to the fishing and visitor industries (three commenters)

- The timber industry only represents 1% of regional economy now, it no longer plays as an important of economic/social role as it has in the past, and the Forest Plan needs to be reviewed with this in mind.
- The Tongass should be managed recognizing that the fishing industry is the key economic driver in the region.
- There are a number of high value watersheds, on Kupreanof Island in particular, that are in development LUDs now; those LUDs should be changed to protect the salmon habitat, including Irish Creek, Keku Lakes and Creek, Kushahein Lakes and Creek, Lovelace, Totem Bay Watershed, Tunehein Creek, Petersburg Lake and Creek, and Port Houghton.
- People come from all over the world to view Tongass wildlife and wild areas, and these areas should be managed with this in mind.

The Southeast Timber Industry is not Economically Viable (three commenters)

- Tax dollars have been wasted on a non-economically viable timber model.
- The timber industry isn't working even after all of the federal subsidies.
- Most of the timber sales in the past five years had no bidders – so even the timber industry finds sales uneconomic.
- The 2008 Forest Plan was based on a theoretical need for an integrated wood industry; that need is gone.
- Tongass wood should be sold in-region not overseas.
- Markets for young growth need to be developed.
- The timber industry is bad for the local economy, due to its boom-bust cycles.
- Southeast Alaska is a terrible place for tree farming due to the cold temperatures, slow growth, high rain etc.

Concern Regarding 5-year review process (three commenters)

- The 5-year review process should be following the new forest planning rules.
- Without rules and guidance, the public doesn't know how their comments will affect Forrest Cole's decision making.
- There is concern that this process is only for show and that comments will not have any impact on decision-making.
- There are various ongoing public processes that seem disconnected to each other.

- If there is an extension of the comment period, it should go all of the way to fall, as summer is not the time in southeast Alaska for fishermen and many others to be involved in a public process.

Poor Communication/Public Access to documents (two commenters)

- The Tonka Timber Sale conducted an EIS and then was followed by a 100-page change analysis. Within that change analysis, another 113 acres was taken from the Lindenberg Peninsula. The public didn't have the opportunity to review or respond to this change order.
- There have been problems getting information on monitoring and evaluation of this Forest Plan. The information that is available to the public is not adequate.

Hydroelectric Power Uses (one commenter)

- Hydropower resources have not been adequately considered in the current Forest Plan.
- Many areas have a conflict between hydro and other uses.
- A development LUD that allows hydro power isn't appropriate for Scenery Creek. It should be in a Remote Recreation LUD rather than a Scenic Viewshed LUD.

Forest should have selected cutting for music wood only (one commenter)

- The only logging in the Tongass should be selective logging for music wood and for other very specific high quality purposes.
- Just a dozen music wood trees are equivalent to a whole mountainside of old growth clearcut timber.

Meeting Attendees

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Buck Lindenkugel | 7. Martha Smith |
| 2. Clarence Clark | 8. Matt Lichtenstein |
| 3. David Beebe | 9. Mike Stainbrook |
| 4. David Randrup | 10. Paul Slenkamp |
| 5. Eric Lee | 11. Stan Hjort |
| 6. Karin McCullough | |

TNF Team

Jason Anderson, Petersburg District Ranger
 Sue Jennings, Forest Planner
 Barbara Sheinberg, Sheinberg Associates
 Donovan Bell, Sheinberg Associates
 Meilani Schijvens, Sheinberg Associates

4.0 Comments offered for the record at Petersburg Public Meeting

Mike Stainbrook

As you look at the plan, is there room for any of the LUDs to be changed? I am specifically referring to the LUD that is designated in Petersburg Creek. I would like it to go from scenic to remote or wilderness, and I know wilderness is an act of Congress, but I'd like to see it remote without the ability for commercial use. If you cannot convert the area to a different LUD, I would like to see all of Petersburg Creek protected as a Wild and Scenic River.

Eric Lee

In past five years, the sales that have come out of the Forest Service have been contrary to the conservation strategy to maintain viable wildlife populations. If you look at our own island since significant logging, the deer population has collapsed. There are no meaningful hunting opportunities on Mitkof Island anymore. People go out, but a lot of people don't go now because the chance of getting a deer is so slim. The same thing is happening across the Narrows on Lindenberg Peninsula, the deer population is crashing. I want to see this change. At one time, this island was the breadbasket of our community. Then when the deer population crashed the deer season was closed for 16 or 17 years. People started going to Lindenberg Peninsula to get their deer, but now most of the winter range has been deforested there and this area is in the same situation. Our subsistence opportunities have been reduced to nothing in those two areas, which were the breadbasket of our community. Something needs to change.

So far the timber program really hasn't worked. The idea of having a tree farm in the Tongass really isn't practical. There have been hundreds of millions of dollars that have been pumped into trying to make that idea work. This has to stop. People must realize that this isn't a good place for tree farming. It's too cold, it rains too much, the trees grow too slow, it's too hard to get the trees to market, and it's too expensive. After all the money taxpayers have put into trying to support the timber industry, it has collapsed. One by one the operators have gone broke. I think we need to start managing the Tongass for fish/salmon production, and also only for selective cutting of what's left of valuable deer winter habitat, such as for music wood. I believe that just one-two dozen music wood trees are equivalent of basically a whole mountain side of old growth clearcut timber. The habitat that's left is critically important. There is undeniable proof that the timber industry isn't working even after all of the federal subsidies.

My real reason for being here is to request that there be no clearcutting on Mitkof Island, only have selective logging for music wood and for other very specific high quality purposes where the money can stay in the community rather than being

shipped out. Let's keep the money here. If we could do this, we would get the deer back. (Presents two sets horns from locally shot deer, one by his grandfather in early 1900s and one by his father in 1970.) You just don't see horns like this anymore. If we had some decent habitat, and cultivated the deer population, helped them out, then we could even have a guided hunting season on this island, and bring money through the town that way. Have a policy of letting the island heal itself and get the deer population back, to have a viable hunting population. And maybe bring some money in by continuing a very selective timber program. This is very doable on this island and let's do it. Let's bring the deer back.

Buck Lindenkugel

I work for Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) and I'm here to speak on their behalf. This evaluation process is designed to see if there are new circumstances, changed circumstances, or new information, which requires the adoption of a new plan or amendments to the current plan. We think that it is high time to do that. It's interesting to look at the history of forest planning. The Forest Plan revision process took a long time and then got tossed out by the court, because it relied on a fundamental weakness, and the Forest Service should have revised it in 2008 but did not. This should be the Forest Plan revision now, and the process is going to be cut short. This requires a collaborative process. This should be a forest plan revision. I think it is unfortunate that we are not following the new forest planning rules. Without rules and guidance, we don't know how our comments will affect Forrest Cole's decision making.

Things have changed on the Tongass, and the forest plan needs to change too. Timber used to play an important economic and social role in the region, it no longer does. Commercial fishing and tourism are billion dollar industries now in southeast Alaska, and we should be managing the Tongass for the long-term sustainability of those sectors of the economy. This doesn't mean no timber, it means investing in fixing the habitat in the forest, finding markets for young growth products, and selling that wood here in the region rather than exporting it overseas. The 2008 Forest Plan was based on a theoretical need for an integrated wood industry. That need is gone. We are trying to maintain an industry of some sort here and hopefully we can do it without exporting the wood and without sacrificing the watersheds that are so important for a variety of uses.

As energy costs and fuel prices have risen, customary and traditional uses of forest resources have become increasingly relied upon by local communities. Particularly salmon and deer are important. The forest plan needs to safe guard these community food baskets for those essential uses of the forest.

Another need that wasn't look at in earlier plans is hydro potential. There is potential conflict between hydro and other uses of those areas for a variety of needs. Reservations were made in the 30's and 40's and some things have changed since then. It is really expensive to connect some hydro power sources to the users, and have the economy of scale necessary to make them work. We think that should be looked at and the proper designations for lands created. For example maybe Scenery Creek would be better as a Remote Recreation LUD, rather than a Scenic Viewshed. A hydro development LUD isn't appropriate there. A lot of conflict in the Petersburg community could have been avoided. This is an opportunity for all of the players to come into agreement over LUDs on the forest.

The Petersburg area is a perfect example of a salmon producing forest. Old growth timber isn't the most valuable commodity coming off of these lands, it's the fish. There are a number of high value watersheds on Kupreanof Island in particular that are in development LUDs right now and those LUDs should be changed to protect the salmon habitat.

Local LUDs needs to be changed for long-term use of salmon producing streams in this community. These areas include Irish Creek, and Keku Lakes and Creek, Kushahein Lakes and Creek, Lovelace, Totem Bay watershed, Tunehein creek, Port Houghton, and Petersburg Creek deserve some special attention and the LUDs need to be fixed so that area is maintain for long term productivity and use of this community. These areas should be managed for salmon instead of logging.

When the plan was being revised before, Petersburg Creek was owned by Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT), and maybe state lands before that. It was conveyed by AMHT to the USFS and now is an opportunity to finalize that and safeguard Petersburg Creek for the long term benefit of this community and all Alaskans by designating an appropriate LUD.

Dave Beebe

I'm not entirely confident that if this flood of comments came in any one direction that it would actually have any effect on the outcome of the forest plan. That has a lot to do with marching orders from above and with how budgets are determined, and subversion of the idea that the public process actually means something. We are constantly being confronted by public processes that after the fact were just tokenism.

As regards to the current situation that Mitkof Island and Kupreanof Island are in, in terms of huntable populations of deer, we can be assured that the recent declaration of the Alaska Board of Game to restrict the hunting season and to restrict the bag limit for

deer on Lindenberg Peninsula is an inescapable intended consequence. Over the series of timber sales that were conducted over the last three decades both on Mitkof Island and Lindenberg Peninsula, biologists warned of this very outcome. I have been going through historical archives in the ADF&G that show, just as Eric has pointed out, phenomenal deer populations. Even back then it was recognized by Harry Merriam, TS Smith, and other prominent deer biologists that winter mortality is the most significant issue; it's not hunting pressure. The only thing the deer have to work with is a system of reserves to provide them the food they need, and these needed high volume, old growth, low elevation stands need to have connectivity. Otherwise, they turn into predator traps. They can't escape because the deep snow that surrounds these set aside areas are not going to allow them to escape predators. Even back in the 50s and 60s wildlife biologists were saying the importance of this deer winter habitat can't be overestimated. The timber program has been a billion dollar boondoggle, for both the tax payer and for the local economy. A local economy can't be based upon boom bust cycles.

Right now, we are at a point where the high grading has already occurred and we are working off of whatever the leftovers might be. This has a lot to do with the fact that most of the timber sales in the last 5 years had no bidders; 46% remain on the shelf. After all the effort that the Petersburg Ranger District has gone through to produce timber sales, the timber industry finds them uneconomic. What we are dealing with here is a failed management strategy, in a biological sense.

It is a failed subsistence responsibility by the Forest Service to assure huntable populations of deer. I can't overemphasize the importance of Lindenberg Peninsula as it relates to Mitkof Island and the ability for hunters to access deer without taking their lives in their own hands. Winter mortality works not only on deer but on deer hunters. We once had a world-class deer habitat that provided food to feed families, and this is no longer the case. We have what Dave Person (biologist) refers to as a succession debt; timber regeneration dominated by clearcutting is going to stay with us for a century or more. It doesn't matter how much of a claim that habitat is being restored there is, it will not replace the deer winter habitat, which is so crucial to providing local people with subsistence. These consequences were well demonstrated by biological opinion and they are now demonstrated as historical fact. And yet, we have the Tonka Timber Sale EIS. After the EIS, there was a 100-page "Change Analysis" which resulted in another 113 acres taken from the deer winter range on the Lindenberg Peninsula. This is significant because, the public doesn't have the opportunity to respond to a Change Analysis, the public has no say. We are now in an era to have an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.

The deer model has fatal flaws. The Forest Service has overestimated deer carrying capacity, given the mandate to get the cut wood, you have to wonder if this wasn't a deliberate attempt to get the cut out without admitting that the Forest Service isn't capable of getting the cut out and supplying the necessary deer habitat. This has ramifications on the Alexander Archipelago wolf. The Forest Plan hasn't taken into account the amount of degradation that has occurred outside the Tongass Forest boundaries. You not only have a corrupted deer model, which has overestimated the carrying capacity, but we don't have a great idea of whether there will be enough deer to supply the Alexander Archipelago wolf and the hunting pressure. This hunting pressure is guaranteed to increase over time as the Southeast population increases. The timber industry only represents less than one percent of the regional economy at this point. The Forest Plan should be updated to reflect these current economic realities.

Dave Randrup

There have been 25 years of biologists studying deer here. I bought property in 1956 that later became adjacent to a timber sale; 20 years later it was logged. I can see change that has happened.

In early 1950's in Southeast Alaska, there were 10,000 deer harvested, as the population built up in the late 50s and early 60s, deer harvest was approximately 14,000 deer. The Petersburg share of that harvest was 1,400-1,800 deer per year. Given the habitat that we are losing from logging, the old growth habitat that we've lost will never be replaced. Not only do we have habitat loss, but our last harvest of deer in Petersburg was around 180 for the season. This was a big change over 1,400-1,800 deer per year. There was supposed to be a trade off, but we are clearly well past the balance point. If you are taking one resource and tanking another – I don't know how you justify that. I've had a problem getting information on monitoring and evaluation of this Forest Plan. The information that is available to the public is not adequate. There is not enough cooperation between the State government, the Federal government, and the public. We are losing our resource. I am trying to protect that resource for my kids and grandkids down the line.

Karin McCullough

I'm concerned about this process and the Tongass. In our area specifically, we have two different EIS processes going on right now. One with the electrical intertie and one with road systems, which affects all southeast Alaska with its plan to create a connected system. I'm concerned about how these things, along with the logging, are going to affect all of the things we are talking about here. I'm confused as we go through all of these public processes, which seem disconnected but yet connected. This Forest Plan review seems to be the one that is at the top, which sets the guidelines for the Tongass.

We should take a really hard look at the Tongass Forest Plan first and then look at these other areas, which may mean slowing things down a little bit. How do we protect this area for the sustainability of fish and wildlife, for both the use of citizens here and from people coming from urban centers where this is a highly valued resource? Worldwide we are one of the few places that have this. Given climate change, given populations, maybe we shouldn't be killing the wolves to get the deer back.

If the comment period is extended, I request that it go through the summer to fall. Summer is not the time in southeast Alaska for fishermen and many others to be involved in a public process. Thanks to everyone in Petersburg Ranger District for helping to inform us.

When the LUD for Petersburg Creek was established, there were a lot of comments to put make it Remote, but it was made Semi-Remote LUD. I never understood why. I do appreciate that the Forest Service is protecting it and that it is not Alaska Mental Health Trust land now, as it would have been developed as housing. Thank you.

Martha Smith

I appreciate the historical context, but I think we must go even farther back and see that the forest here reached its peak long before the Forest Service was here to manage it. The first part of intelligent tinkering is to keep all of the pieces and we have not been doing that. It is time to look at the pieces and save what's left. We didn't do a good job and it is time to do it differently.