

The Best of the Rest

On Sept. 13 the Forest Service will hold two open houses at the Holy Cross House for their proposed “Central Tongass Project”. Under the guise of “analyzing a variety of resource management actions,” the project is in truth, a huge timber sale.

If approved, the project may log up to 150 million board feet (MMBF) from old growth forest and 80 MMBF of second growth. That will come from 12,500 acres (about 20 square miles) of forest on already heavily logged Mitkof and nearby islands and the mainland.

This project continues the trend of managing Tongass public lands as a subsidized timber colony for Alcan/Transpac Group, an international raw log exporter headquartered in Vancouver B.C., and Viking Lumber of Klawock. Viking is also a large-scale raw log exporter.

The project is being proposed during a time when the agency claims to be “transitioning” away from logging old growth – but this shows it plainly is not. The amount of old-growth logging is still extreme, and second-growth-for-export is not a transition! Notably the Tongass is the last national forest in the nation still practicing old-growth logging.

The timber industry has already logged the best timber and now they are going after the best of the rest.

As detailed below, I believe the Forest Service lacks the institutional capacity to administer such large timber sales on the Tongass because of oversight, contractual and appraisal issues. The agency has a long history of allowing timber operators to operate in a lawless manner in Southeast Alaska. It has ignored timber export violations, scaling fraud, and outright timber theft under what is known as the “Alaska Rules”.

In 2016, a high-level Forest Service review was done on the timber sale administration processes for two Viking Lumber timber sales – the Tonka on Lindenberg Peninsula of Kupreanof Island and the Big Thorne on Prince of Wales Island. The review showed several deficiencies, including:

(1) Agency personnel allowed Viking to illegally high-grade the most ecologically valuable trees rather than those intended for removal to achieve the desired “forest ecosystem health” effects. (2) The Forest Service failed to conduct required timber-theft prevention inspections. (3) Monitoring and reports of timber removals, etc. were self-reported by Viking Lumber Company.

This malfeasance alone cost taxpayers \$2 million on the Tonka Timber Sale—more than twice the amount Viking paid for the timber. On-the-ground operators admitted that they cut only according to Viking Lumber’s instructions—not terms of the timber sale contract or Forest Service’s harvest prescriptions. Moreover, the agency’s timber appraisal rates were artificially low

for higher value species such as Alaska Yellow Cedar and Sitka Spruce, giving Viking an undeserved gift.

The “anything goes” timber beast culture that plagues the agency in Alaska must end. The time is now, and proposing this massive timber project is unjustified.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Knight