

THE



POINT



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COUNTERPOINT



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Background photo courtesy of Alaska Division of Tourism.

TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

POINT

A SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE

YOUR HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES MAY BE LOST IN FAVOR OF LOGGING

Diminished hunting opportunities is the last thing we would expect from a Republican controlled U.S. Congress. The second biggest surprise out of Washington, D.C. this year is the abandonment of true "multiple use" policies for federal lands in favor of single use management schemes.

Both these unwelcome surprises may radically alter the lives and livelihoods of residents of Alaska's Southeastern coast, most of which is part of the Tongass National Forest. The Tongass, created for the use and enjoyment of all of us by the great Republican President, Theodore Roosevelt in 1907, is both our nation's largest public forest reserve and the largest intact temperate rain forest on Earth. The wildlands of the Tongass are unparalleled; this region is a sportsman's paradise, teeming with fish and game — including some of the densest populations of Alaska brown bears anywhere.

Ironically, both the loss of hunting opportunity and

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counter POINT

SPORTSMEN BEWARE

DON'T BELIEVE RHETORIC ABOUT THE TONGASS FOREST

Hypothetical: Let's say, God forbid, that I am an extreme preservationist. My motto—the more wilderness the better. Let's say you are the sportsman in this hypothetical. Someday you want to try your big game skills in Alaska.

Question: How do I get you to help me with my goal of locking up more and more public lands of this great nation.

Answer: I'd write the exact same piece that you read right before this article. I'd use fear and half truths to scare you. I may even say that those crazy Alaskans want more logging at, of course, the expense of the habitat protection, and imply that their proposal will impact your ability to hunt big game and trophy fish in Alaska. If I said enough wild, insupportable things, I might even get your attention long enough for you to consider helping me with my lock up the lands goal.

End of hypothetical. Now for reality.

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A SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE YOUR HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES MAY BE LOST IN FAVOR OF LOGGING

of the Tongass that were protected by Congress from

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the single use management scheme that would exclude hunters is being proposed by Alaska's own congressional delegation in four pieces of legislation that would vastly increase clearcut logging in the Tongass. These four bills fly in the face of extensive research from professional game managers warning of detrimental impacts to Tongass fish and game from excessive clearcut logging. In fact, some of these bills even order the U.S. Forest Service to ignore their own research and set up logging no matter what it does to the other user groups who depend upon the Tongass...even hunters.

Let's examine these bills in some depth.

In October 1994, Senator Frank Murkowski introduced the so-called "Landless Natives" legislation, proposing to "settle" the claims of five Alaska Native villages allegedly left out of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Senator Murkowski calls the exclusion "inadvertent," but these five villages did not meet the basic criteria established for land claims in that law and still don't today. Yet, Murkowski's proposal would take 1,000 square miles of premium Tongass hunting and fishing lands out of public ownership and simply give them to private Native village corporations that would no doubt initiate intensive logging operations harming fish and game species and restrict or prohibit public access. Bad news for sportsmen.

Worse yet, under Murkowski's Landless Natives bill the Native lands could only be selected from those parts

clearcut logging in another law, the Tongass Reform Act of 1990. The State of Alaska, numerous small communities, commercial fisherman and sportsmen's groups had all supported permanent protection of these lands for their exceptional fish and game habitat and public use values. Negative impacts to premium public lands and reduced hunter access would be direct results of Murkowski's bill.

Thankfully, the local backlash against this particular bill by the Territorial Sportsmen, the Alaska Outdoor Council, and other multiple use interests has at least persuaded Senator Murkowski to rewrite his proposal. We are waiting to see what the new draft does.

The second salvo fired by the Alaska Congressional Delegation came last July, with the introduction of S. 1054 (deceptively titled the "Southeast Alaska Jobs and Committee Protection Act"), sponsored by Senators Murkowski and Stevens. This bizarre bill includes an unheard of mandate forcing the U.S. Forest Service to manage the Tongass to provide enough government-subsidized timber to maintain logging jobs at their historical maximum levels. This mandate applies no matter what the impacts to fish and game, no matter what the reductions to existing tourism or commercial fishing jobs, no matter what the cost to the U.S. taxpayer, and no matter what the free market does to timber prices or demand. Sound bad? It's worse...

This bill goes after 700,000 acres of the prime fish and wildlife habitat protected in the Tongass Timber Reform Act, putting it back on the timber sales chopping block. "Virtually all of [this land] is critical habitat for fish and wildlife," says Dr. Fred Everest, team leader of a panel of Forest Service experts studying salmon habitat in

Tongass streams and rivers. Salmon fishing in Alaska is world class even today, with all five species of Pacific salmon still abundant. Dr. Everest has determined that the streams of the Tongass are the world's most productive salmon spawning habitat. However, we need only look at the crash of the salmon runs of Washington, Oregon, and California to see what will happen in the Tongass if we fail to protect our critical salmon streams from the impacts of clearcut logging. Like the Landless Natives bill, S. 1054 is currently being re-written after provoking a storm of controversy. We wait to see what changes.

The third attack on the interests of hunters comes in the form of a last-minute amendment, attached by Senator Stevens, to the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, H.R. 1977, currently being debated before Congress. This amendment, which has never had adequate public scrutiny, short-circuits public process and the Forest Service's multiple use plan for management of the Tongass by forbidding the agency from spending money on anything other than Steven's favorite alternative — one which puts logging first, without regard to the needs of other user groups or impacts to fish and game. This alternative (designated as "P") was part of a plan the Forest Service scrapped in 1991. At the time, Alternative P was opposed by more than 70 percent of the Alaskans who wrote to comment about the plan. Now, it has little or no support, except from Senator Stevens and some logging companies.

The Alaska Outdoor Council (AOC), is an organization dedicated to defending America's fishing and hunting heritage and to assuring the protection and fair allocation of public resources through wise management. AOC, representing over 40 Alaskan hunting and fishing clubs and 10,000 individual members, recently denounced Steven's amendment to the Interior budget bill. In a letter to House and Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittees, the Outdoor Council said it "strongly objects" to the amendment, characterizing it as burdensome, and noted that "Alternative P ignores significant scientific, economic and social information... gained since 1991." The Council stated that it "strongly supports the U.S. Forest Service com-

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pleting the Tongass Land Management Plan revisions process" and asked the Committee to delete Stevens' amendment. The letter ends with a "request for fairness to all users of the Tongass National Forest."

The fate of the Stevens amendment to the Interior Appropriation bill is uncertain as of this time. President Clinton has vowed to veto the bill unless the Tongass provisions and other anti-conservation measures are deleted. It remains to be seen whether the President will back up his word and whether his veto will be upheld by Congress.

Meanwhile, Representative Don Young, chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources has launched the fourth attack. On September 27th Young introduced legislation that would give the entire Tongass National Forest to the state of Alaska — all 17 million acres. Representative Young's move was described by him as a challenge not only to Tongass management policies, but to the very concept of federal public land ownership. This radicalism discounts a tradition of American public land ownership that has been providing benefits to all our citizens, especially hunters, since the early years of this great nation.

Young's proposal wouldn't just transfer ownership of the Tongass to Alaska, however. He attached a few strings. Young would scrap current protection for all areas reserved for fish and wildlife habitat, including one of the world's best brown bear hunting areas, Admiralty Island National Monument, the famed "fortress of the bears". But he would demand that the State of Alaska honor existing 50-year monopoly timber contracts and reinstate another that was previously owned by Japan's Alaska Pulp Corporation.

Tongass timber sales have never recovered their cost of preparation, administration, and access. American taxpayers cover the loss by appropriating about \$40 million from the U.S. Treasury to the Forest Service every year (over time the loss has amounted to hundreds of millions). If Alaska accepted the Tongass, with these subsidized contracts, it would very likely meet the financial burden of selling off parts of the Tongass or running the whole forest as a tree farm. Once again, public access and public use would lose out to private corporate use.

That's another major threat to hunter's interests.

After just forty years of boat-based guiding and outfitting through the islands of the coastal Tongass forest, we find fewer than 60 percent of the bays and inlets remain suitable for guided hunting activities — pursuit of brown bear, black bear and deer. The reason is logging. The four bills proposed by the Alaska Delegation will make this situation worse. These radical logging proposals jeopardize a thriving guiding industry and could permanently foreclose this livelihood. Guiding jobs should be as important to Congress as logging jobs.

Guiding jobs, hunting opportunities, commercial fishing, tourism... all these parts of the Alaskan economy depend on a healthy forest system for habitat. Brown bears must have remote, undeveloped areas in order to survive and breed. Sitka blacktail deer and mountain goats suffer tremendous winter kill from our snows unless they can find the shelter of big trees found in old-growth stands. And salmon must have clean water and unlogged stream corridors in order to spawn. The forest supports the wildlife; and in turn, the wildlife and spectacular landscape support many Alaskan jobs.

Though Tongass wildlife populations are currently healthy overall, the declines from logging are already showing up in certain places and with certain species. Bigger impacts are clearly predicted to show up in the next 30 years.

The essence of conservation ethics is to be careful. Should the fish and game populations suffer as a result of Tongass logging, which virtually all credible fish and wildlife experts predict, the impact to our economy would be devastating. According to the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, the value of trip-related expenditures to Alaska was \$291,254,000 in 1991. That's a lot of money in a state with just half a mil-



lion people. Southeast Alaska's share of this bounty is probably at least a third, or \$100,000,000 shared among just 60,000 people. So the radical Tongass logging proposals offered in this Congress are bad for business, too.

The Alaska Congressional Delegation's obsession with promoting logging jobs at all costs ignores the fact that Southeast Alaska's economy is actually prospering, even as timber jobs decline. Tourism is booming. Commercial fishing is holding its own. Sitka, a former logging town is finding out that economic diversity is better than dependence on one industry. The free market works if you just leave it alone.

There is room on the Tongass for a forest industry, one that respects and remains in balance with the ecology of the land - maximizing the value of each stick of wood to make finished products (furniture, boats, etc.) on American soil. Current Tongass proposals only serve to promote a subsidized, unsustainable, raw exportation of forest resources to the Asian market, where products are produced - and frequently sold back - at a profit. The Tongass debate is simply not an environment vs. job issue. Hunters, guides, commercial fisherman, tourism businesses and Native subsistence hunters are uniting to conserve the forest on which our jobs and quality of life depend.

SHOWN HERE ARE TWO EXAMPLES OF THE CLEAR CUT LOGGING THAT IS ALREADY TAKING PLACE IN THE TONGASS.

Photos courtesy of SEACC.

SPORTSMEN BEWARE DON'T BELIEVE RHETORIC ABOUT THE TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Young - Republican, is currently serving his 12th term as Alaska's only member in the U.S. House of Representatives. He is the Chairman of the House Committee on Resources and serves on the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. Mr. Young has received many conservation awards including the Denali Award given by the Alaska Federation of Natives. Mr. Young has been a member of the Boone and Crockett Club since 1990.

Shame on Messrs. Rosenbruch and Rosier and professional environmentalists who resort to scaring sportsmen into believing that the new Republican Congress will diminish hunting opportunities and multiple use. Double shame on the scare mongers spouting unfounded allegations about the Alaska delegation's proposals for actual residents of the Tongass National Forest. Their piece sounds like the same sort of hyperbolic argument that the extreme environmentalists used to fight the Alaska Department of Fish and Game when they were culling an out of balance wolf population as a wildlife management tool.

Before getting suckered into the preservationist rhetoric that seeks to scare everyone, take a look at the real Tongass data. Then decide for yourself. Is there even the slightest risk of habitat shortage in the Nation's largest National Forest?

The 17 million acre Tongass is about the size of West Virginia and has 10 million forested acres, only 1 million of which are available for logging. The rest is set aside for other purposes: 9 million acres total

everything else.

All our delegation looks for, and all we've wanted, is some stability for all interests in the Tongass—including sustainable logging. While sustainable yield in the Tongass open to logging is 874 million board feet annually, logging families would settle for half that amount. But this year's offerings by the Forest Service were a mere 262 million board feet or one-third of the biological capability of the forest.

In 1980 and again in 1990, Congress added wilderness and other habitat protection in the Tongass. Each time, extreme preservationists who urged wilderness withdrawals promised that enough timber would remain to support the same timber job level.

I did not support the 1990 "compromise." I knew that it was really a sucker punch to the timber economy of the Tongass. Five years later, the devastating results of the 1990 law are apparent: 42% of the Tongass timber jobs have vanished. Thousands of family wage earners now go without paychecks.

Installed mill capacity dropped nearly 20% from 1990 to 1994. The productive timber infrastructure is dying in the Tongass. To make matters worse, the Forest Service now spends 30% more money in Alaska (\$113 million in 1994, compared to \$88 million in 1990) to get much less timber. Figure that out.

The preservation extremists now want more. They go back on their promise of peace in the Tongass by urging that valid, legal contracts be canceled. They appeal and sue on almost every timber sale in the Tongass. They

monkey wrench using our environmental laws, which they manipulate into procedural hurdles that have little to do with environmental protection.

High with their spotted owl success, the craziest of the crazies try to import their politically correct Pa-

the Tongass for wilderness and

cific Northwest logging roadblocks into the Tongass. Their lazy science is called "new information" on habitat loss impacts. And the Alaska wing of the federal Forest Service bought this "new information" poppycock—hook, line, and sinker.

I remember the last time the same gurus told us their "new information" theory on stream-side management. "Remove the large woody debris from the streams after you harvest timber," they said. When all the fish died because strong currents washed them away, they figured out what every angler knew from childhood. The best fishing hole is by a log or rock. The light bulb went off: fish like eddies near large woody debris.

I'd put about as much stock in their "new information" Habitat Conservation Area theory (called HCAs) as I would put in their "new information" theory that said to remove the large woody debris from streams. At best it is a good guess by a political scientist.

Translated, their HCA theory is that big blocks of Wilderness are out and "islands" of smaller "habitat conservation areas" are in. So much for the million acre Admiralty and two million acre Misty wilderness areas in the Tongass. Never mind the 29 other, mostly larger wilderness and no logging zones that the Congress already set aside in the Tongass as part of the 1980 and 1990 laws.

Using the "HCA" theory, one extreme preservationist group claimed even that a type of Alaskan wolf should be listed under the Endangered Species Act, even though not one shred of evidence showed a decline. Remember, 93% of the productive old growth in the Tongass is intact. The wolf, goes their logic, would face decline sometime within the next 150 years because more logging meant more roads and more roads meant more access and more access meant more HUNTING of wolf and their primary food source: deer. (Friends, the bag limit was 5 wolf per year and hunters could take 4 deer.) Get the picture? These guys should not be your friends.

So, does logging hurt the forest or habitat? Organized commercial logging really began in 1954. About 10,000 acres per year



for wilderness, salmon stream buffers, administrative wildlife areas, habit protection areas, and other areas off limits to logging.

During the past 86 years, logging occurred on less than 500,000 acres of the Tongass. That's 3% of the Tongass for logging and 97% of

have been logged in those 41 years. During the next 50 years, logging will proceed at the same rate. By the end of the 100 year rotation, about 1,000,000 acres should be logged. Again 16 million acres are not on the chopping block.

As the rotation nears completion in the year 2040, Forest Service data says that 78% of the 1954 old growth habitat will be 100% intact. By the year 2150, that's 155 years from now, 70% of the original old growth in the Tongass will still be virgin. No chain saws, just habitat. Those numbers are right out of the Forest Service's own foot thick Tongass management plan revision. That plan revision was shelved because it did not incorporate the vogue, politically correct HCA theory.

Our astute Senior Senator from Alaska, Ted Stevens, picked up on the funny business politicizing the new plan. His proposal is to codify the old Forest Service plan, the one written before it was perverted with the HCA concept. The Stevens proposal is really a Forest Service product that leaves 70% of the old growth habitat untouched 155 years from now. It allows the remaining 30% to be changed, and as most true conservationists know, timber management is often good for wildlife. Interestingly, it includes all of the 1980 and 1990 legislative constraints—including new wilderness and fish stream buffers—that the Congress directed.

Our other insightful Senator from Alaska, Frank Murkowski, took what I call "a deal is a deal" approach. Proponents of the 1990 Tongass law said that if their compromise—more wilderness and fish stream buffers—was enacted, the loggers and timber workers would still have enough timber land to maintain timber jobs at 1990 levels. With 42% of the 1990 Tongass timber jobs gone, Senator Murkowski's bill simply requires the Forest service to maintain enough timber land base for the 1990 timber job level.

While our Senators have their own approaches to Tongass problems, my solution is more straightforward. I think that the best people to solve the conflicts over management of the Tongass are Alaskans—and they

should have the power to own and manage the forest. The Federal machine in Washington, D.C. has proven that it does not have answers that work in the Tongass. In the meantime, Alaskans have proven their conservation stewardship on the 100 million acres now managed by the State.

My Tongass bill gives the people and the State of Alaska the opportunity and responsibility to own and manage the Tongass. That may sound radical to people outside of Western public land states. It is radical for those from the preservationist perspective who now enjoy one stop shopping Washington, D.C. for all their public land lock up needs.

The reality is that the taxpayers of the United States can no longer afford the lavish lifestyle of owning 650 million acres of federal land and the billions of dollars it takes to administer it. We already know that states can manage the land better for less money—without all of the federal controversy. And most states do a great job managing their public lands.

None of these legislative proposals accelerates that rate of logging by exclusively favoring timber at detriment to habitat. My bill is distinguished from the Senate proposals because it allows Alaskans—who depend most on Tongass wildlife, fish, recreation, and timber resources—to make conservation decisions about managing the forest.

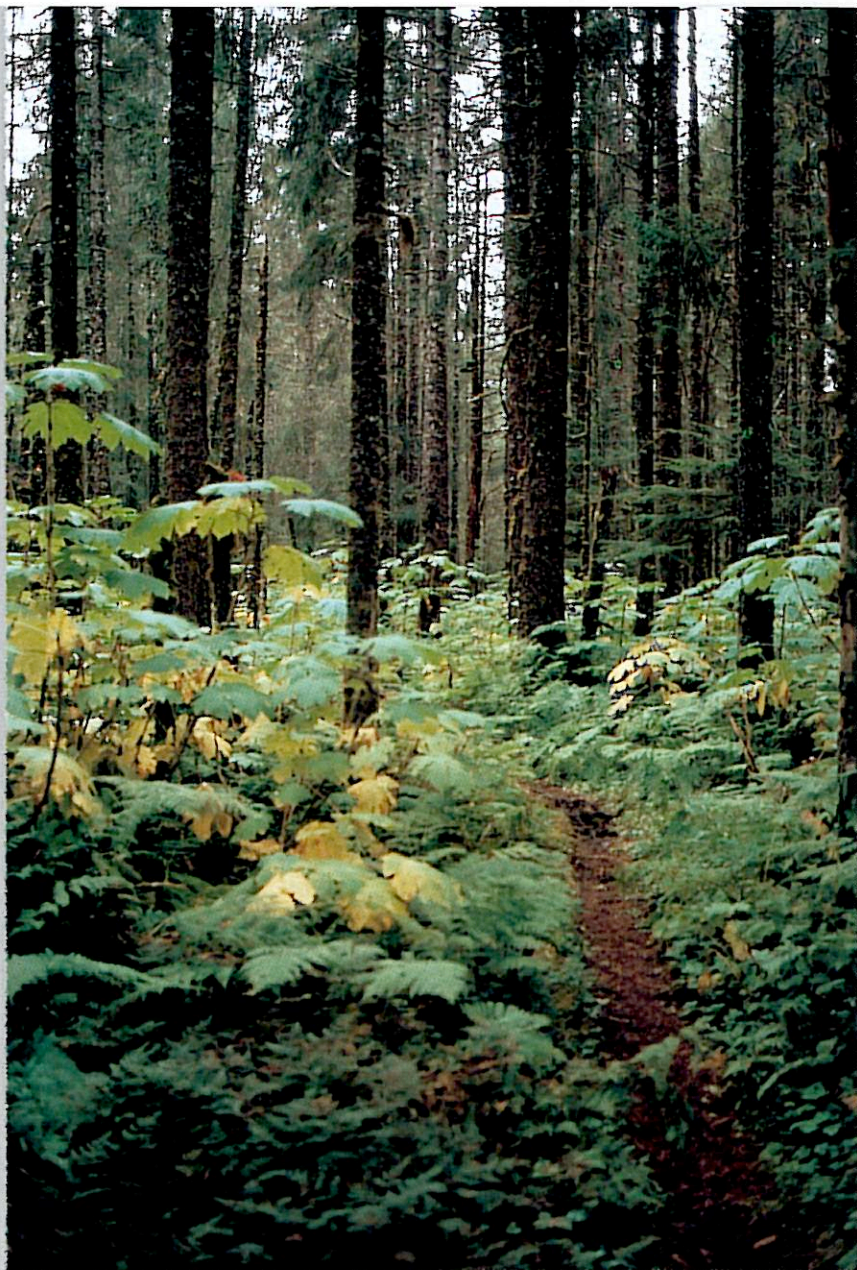


PHOTO COURTESY OF SEACC.

There is not, never has been, and never will be habitat shortages in the Tongass—regardless of whether the state or federal government controls the Tongass. Plentiful fish, deer, wolf, bear, birds and other wildlife abound in the Tongass, making it a trophyman's paradise. Six of the top ten harvests of salmon during the last 110 years have occurred in the Tongass in the last 10 years. Trophy size bear and mountain goat abound in the Tongass.

One million acres spread over 100 years for timber and 16 million for everything else. Is that a fair balance? Not according to the preservation zealots. That's why, ultimately, I think Alaskans must manage the Tongass based on conservation policies derived and carried out by Alaskans who are true conservation leaders.