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House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

OVERSIGHT HEARING

“Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential”

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

There have been several EOs signed by President Trump that should have positive effects on how the federally owned forest resources within Alaska are managed. They include:

Executive Order 14153, Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential was signed by President Trump on January 20, 2025.

The portion of the EO that is directly connected to the timber industry in Alaska is Section 3 – Specific Agency Actions. Subsection (c) stated that the Roadless Rule of 1-22-23 was to be removed and that the Roadless Rule of 10-29-20 was to be reinstated. The 10-29-20 Roadless Rule exempted the Tongass National Forest from Roadless. The exemption was never realized on the Tongass because the Forest Service did not follow the instructions by Secretary Perdue to administrative change the Forest Plan to reflect the removal of the Rule from the Tongass.

Executive Order 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation signed on 1-31-25 which also mentions the removal of the Roadless Rule.

Executive Order 14223, Addressing the Threat to National Security from the Import of Timber, Lumber and their Derivative Products signed on 3-1-25

Executive Order 14225, Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production signed on 3-1-25

CURRENT STATE

The State of Alaska is home to the 2 largest national forests in the country, the Chugach and the Tongass National Forest encompassing almost 24 million acres.

Ninety five percent of the Chugach National Forest's 6.9 million acres are in roadless areas. The Chugach's Forest Plan has no allowable sawlog cut, providing only for firewood harvest of which the Forest sells about 2 hundred thousand feet annually.

In southeast Alaska where the Tongass National Forest is located, the federal government owns 94% of the land. The Tongass at approximately 16.8 million acres in size includes 85% of the land in southeast. Approximately 66% of the Tongass is within roadless areas. There are 19 wilderness areas, more than any other national forest, that contains 5.9 million acres within the Tongass. In total approximately 13.5 million acres of the Tongass are managed in their natural state.

The development land base within the Tongass is 3.3 million acres in size; of which approximately 350,000 acres, or 2% of the entire forest, are suitable and available for timber harvest per the 2016 Forest Plan.

The current Forest Plan has an annual Projected Timber Sale Quantity (PTSQ) of 46MMBF (million board feet); currently the existing forest products industry uses 50-55 MMBF annually. The average annual timber volume sold by the Forest Service over the last 5 years is 2.5 MMBF or 5% of the PTSQ. During the same timeframe, harvest on the Tongass has averaged 11.6 MMBF annually which is 4.6 times the amount of volume sold. The remaining volume used by industry has come from State lands in southeast.

UNLEASHING the POTENTIAL

Stability is the key to unleashing the potential of the federal owned timber resources in southeast Alaska. Stability of the forest management intent of the Tongass; the Forest Service has started the planning process for the 3rd Forest Plan in 17 years. Typically forest plans have a life span of 15 years or more. Applicability of the roadless rule on the Tongass has flip-flopped back and forth over the last 3 administrations. Is management of the Tongass based on the current Forest Plan or by directions given in a Press Release by the Secretary of Agriculture?

The Forest Service employees on the Tongass appear as confused as a boxer who has been severely beaten and knocked out by their opponent. What should they do? Follow the Forest

Plan or directions given in a press release? Plan based on the roadless rule applying to the Tongass or not? Will the projects they are working on be cancelled prior to completion? Since 2021, 3 NEPA projects were cancelled containing a total of 352 MMBF of timber of which 102MMBF was Young Growth. These projects were cancelled after the Press Release that told the Tongass to immediately transition to a Young Growth based timber sale program.

Stability for the forest products industry means a steady dependable supply of economic timber sales at a volume that matches their need. The timber industry, like the wildlife in southeast, is old growth dependent. The Tongass is an old growth forest. Industry uses the wood from the Tongass to fill high-end niche markets. The Tongass provides wood for doors, windows, house trim, mast for sailboats, shafts for arrows, sound boards and structural components for string instruments such as guitars and pianos, wood for cultural use, space exploration and national security.

OBTAINING STABILITY

Industry believes the best way to obtain stability is through Congressional action. Protect the Tongass from EOs, Administrative Rule, Memorandums and Press Releases that change the management direction of the Tongass on a four year or sometimes shorter cycle.

How?

Acknowledge that the Tongass is an old growth forest and should remain an old growth forest. Not by stopping timber harvest, but by utilizing an extended rotation timeframe that replaces harvested old growth with old growth. Grow timber for niche markets that must have old growth timber from the Tongass for the products they produce. Using the Tongass to produce dimensional lumber is not the highest and best use for the forest. Industry supports a rotation length of 250 years.

Pass legislation that sets aside a land base of sufficient size for timber management on an extended rotation basis. Congress has acted multiple times to set aside acres for scenic, natural, cultural and environmental values; it is time to do the same to protect the ability to provide a “continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of the people of the United States” (Forest Service Organic act of 1897)

Beef up the “no more” wording in ANILCA so that federal land management agencies cannot circumvent the balance of protection of resources and the economic and social needs of the State of Alaska that Congress envisioned through ANICLA.

Lastly, direct the Forest Service to provide training and need leadership to their employees on the Tongass. Develop a Forest Plan that acknowledges the Tongass as an old growth forest and all of the multiple use values that an old growth forest provides including forest products. A Plan that will make the Tongass a healthy working forest for generations to come.