

The Bush Administration has a Clear Cut Agenda to Log America's Last Great Rainforest in Alaska

December 23, 2003 - The Bush administration revoked protection for over 9 million acres in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. The Tongass - the world's largest remaining tract of coastal temperate rainforest - is a stronghold for eagles, bears, wolves, wild salmon and other fish and wildlife that have largely disappeared from elsewhere in the country. The Bush administration decision paves the way for fifty logging projects and road building in remaining pristine rainforest areas. (USFS Ten-year Schedule of Tongass Timber Projects, *http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/management%20news/resources/03-12tsp_93002.pdf.)

The rainforest had been protected under an enormously popular rule that safeguards large tracts of unroaded and unlogged areas in National Forests nationwide. Removing protections from roadless areas in the Tongass will allow clearcutting of over 300,000 acres of the best remaining old growth forest with associated road building leaving and industrial-scale footprint across more than 2.5 million acres.

The Bush administration's decision puts the Tongass National Forest under an indefinite "temporary" exemption from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The Forest Service has also begun the regulatory process of making the exemption permanent and extending it to include the Chugach National Forest, the second largest National Forest, where over 5 million acres are currently protected.

Four Tongass Roadless Logging Projects Expected to Move Quickly

▼ Gravina Timber Sale in the Gravina Roadless Area

The Gravina Roadless Area comprises 38,845 acres of magnificent wildlands on central and south Gravina Island – highly valued for its pristine, biologically productive watersheds and wildlife habitat. Close enough to Ketchikan for hiking and hunting day trips, Gravina is a prime destination for Ketchikan residents and visitors alike. It also contains areas Native Alaskans hold dear for historic, cultural, and subsistence reasons. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game rates Gravina Island subsistence activities as most sensitive to disturbance.

► **Wildlife at risk:** Wolf, black bear, marten, mink, beaver, Sitka black-tailed deer, waterfowl, and bald eagle.

► **Status of sale:** Draft Environmental Impact Statement issued.

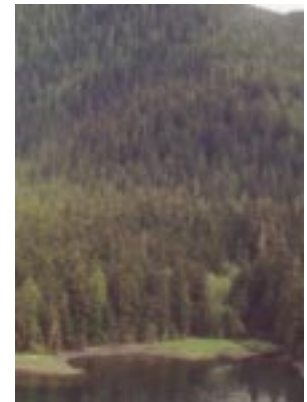


Photo by Aurah Landau

▲ Gravina Roadless Area threatened by timber sale.

▼ Threemile Timber sale in the East Kuiu Roadless Area Complex

This sale would enter the extraordinary East Kuiu Roadless Area complex (three separate roadless areas; East Kuiu, Rocky Pass, and Camden) on Kuiu Island. This area encompasses an extensive and intricate coastline where estuaries, coves, and bays outline the rich old-growth forests of Kuiu Island. These sheltered waterways provide wonderful opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Accordingly, they attract diverse recreational users, including guided kayak expeditions and boaters. East Kuiu is within the traditional territory of the Kake Tlingit tribe which uses the shoreline and abundant fish and wildlife habitat for hunting, fishing, and gathering purposes.

► **Wildlife at risk:** Wolf, moose, black bear, marten, river otter, beaver, Sitka black-tailed deer, waterfowl, and bald eagle.

► **Status of sale:** Draft Environmental Impact Statement issued.



Photo Courtesy of Lighthawk

◀ Kuiu Roadless Area Complex

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▼ Otter Lake Timber Sale in the Neka Mountain Roadless Area

A grand mix of Alaska yellow cedar, western hemlock, and Sitka spruce forms the canopy that shelters wildlife and a diverse forest floor of temperate rainforest plants in the magnificent 53,014-acre Neka Mountain Roadless Area on Chichagof Island. It has highly productive salmon streams that support vibrant populations of coastal brown bears. Equally valued for its important cultural attributes, this roadless area borders Neka Bay – part of the Hoonah Tlingit’s traditional territory and a source of prized subsistence resources including salmon, trout, wild berries, shellfish, crab, and beach and forest greens. The area is also a favorite spot for recreation, including sport fishing. Because of the thickness of the limestone and marble in this area, vertical pits and cave systems of record depth are possible, but have not yet been surveyed. The sale would also impact the Chichagof roadless area, which has similar values.

► **Wildlife at risk:** Brown bear, Sitka black-tailed deer, mink, marten, and river otter. Abundant bird and waterfowl rearing and nesting areas.

► **Status of sale:** Draft Environmental Impact Statement, January 2002.

Otter Lake in Neka Mountain Roadless Area ►



Photo by Buck Lindenkugel

▼ Kosciusko Timber Sale in Kosciusko Roadless Area

Located on heavily logged Kosciusko Island in the Southern reaches of Tongass, the Kosciusko Timber Sale Draft Environmental Impact Statement, calls for logging of between 11 and 26 million board feet of timber and up to 11 miles of road construction.

► **At Risk:** The Kosciusko project area contains swaths of rare forested limestone, also known as karst. Karst areas, quite rare in the Tongass, provide important drainage and nutrient transport functions which often leads to exceptionally large trees growth. In some heavily karsted areas, elaborate cave systems hold animal and human remains which may contain clues to the origin of the region and its animal and human inhabitants. Recently, researchers found human remains in a local cave dating back nearly 10,000 years.



Photo Courtesy of Tongass Cave Project

▲ Kosciusko contains rare karst features

Independent analysis of the Kosciusko project area by members of the National Speleological Society, found 75 percent more karst and cave features than documented by the Forest Service in its planning documents. The independent researchers, known as the Tongass Cave Project, are asking the Forest Service to halt the Kosciusko Timber Sale and manage the area as a Karst Wilderness in order to protect Kosciusko Island’s unique and fragile resources.

► **Status of sale:** Draft Environmental Impact Statement issued.

BUSH ADMINISTRATION DECISION: A GIFT TO THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

With the Roadless Rule in force, the timber industry’s open tab in the Tongass was tempered. Over the last 50 years the Tongass Forest has already lost 550,000 acres of centuries-old giant trees and been marked by 5,000 miles of logging roads financed by the American taxpayer. According to Forest Service data, the Forest Service loses an average of \$35 million per year underwriting road building and logging in the Tongass National Forest. Now the Forest Service is handing a magnificent part of America’s natural heritage back to a timber industry using a false ‘jobs vs. the environment’ argument. The Forest Service should be investing in the future, not returning to the past. According to the Forest Service’s own data, over five times the amount of jobs are created by recreation than the timber industry.

