

endangered forests hot spot: *Tongass*



What's at Stake?

The Tongass National Forest, stretching for 500 miles along the southeast coast of Alaska, contains the last great expanse of coastal temperate rainforest in the United States, and is among the world's largest tracts of old-growth temperate rainforests.

The Tongass is the nation's largest national forest at 17 million acres, an area the size of Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. Over 1,000 mist-shrouded islands, narrow inlets and glacier-carved fjords punctuate the Tongass' 11,000 miles of coastline, which are set against a stunning backdrop of coastal mountains towering up to 18,000 feet.

Majestic sitka spruce, western hemlock and red and yellow cedar dominate its ancient forests. The highest density of grizzly bears in North America thrive in the vast wild reaches of the Tongass and ancient runs of all five species of wild Pacific salmon return here each year, nurturing the forest and its wildlife. Killer whales, humpback whales, porpoises, river and sea otters all thrive in the Tongass' nutrient rich waters.



Berner's Bay, Tongass National Forest. Photo © Greenpeace/Laura Lombardi.



Brown Bear, Tongass National Forest. Photo © Gavin Newman/Greenpeace.

Key Threats to the Forest

Two days before Christmas 2003, the Bush Administration removed protections from just over nine million acres of undeveloped roadless acres of the Tongass National Forest. Now the Forest Service is working closely with the logging industry to build roads and expand clearcutting into as many of these pristine areas as possible.

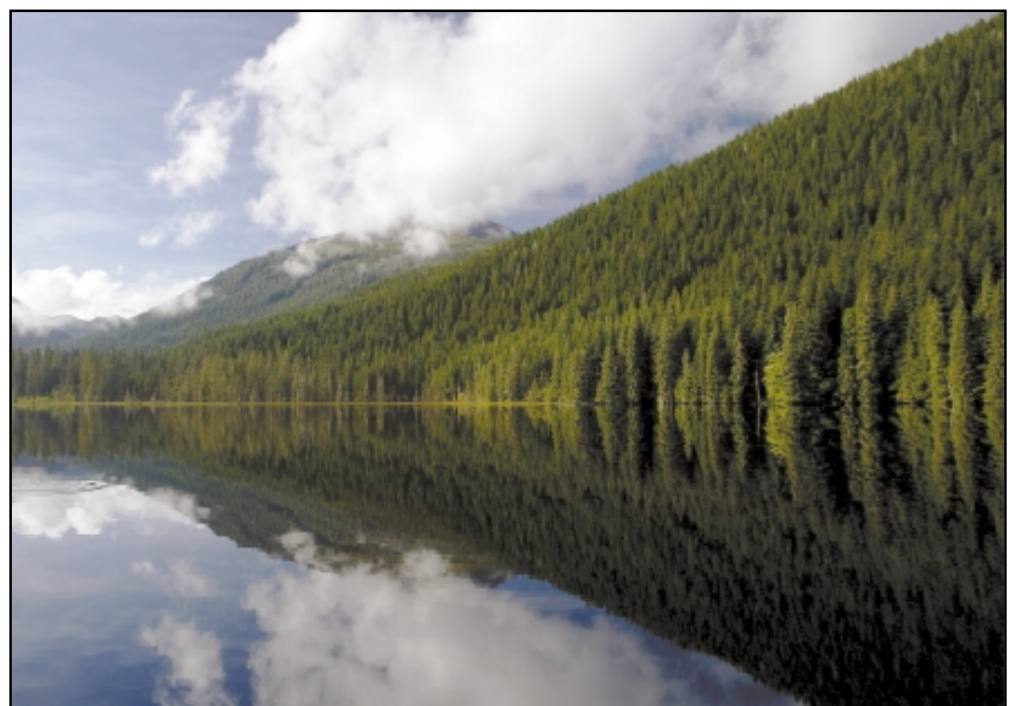
The Forest Service has plans for more than 50 large timber sales in roadless areas of the forest. The agency is planning to clearcut over 300,000 acres of ancient, old-growth rainforest under the current forest plan. Recent rollbacks in national forest management regulations combined with last minute, anti-environmental legislation pushed by Alaska's Congressional delegation, have made public participation in forest management increasingly difficult.

Currently, forest protection organizations are suing to stop nine roadless area logging and roadbuilding projects. On just these logging projects, the Forest Service wants to log 235 million board feet of ancient, old-growth forests – enough trees to fill 47,000 log trucks lined up for 400 miles!

Another significant threat to Alaska's rainforest is the potential reopening of a currently bankrupt veneer mill in Ketchikan. The Forest Service, Alaska's Governor Murkowski, and representatives of the logging industry have been working for months to entice a lower-48 wood products company to agree to re-start and operate the moth-balled mill. The veneer mill has the potential to eat up 40 million board feet (8,000 log trucks full) of ancient, old-growth forest a year.

Alaska's Congressional delegation is also working diligently to privatize as much of the Tongass National Forest as possible, as soon as possible. Senator Lisa Murkowski recently introduced the Alaska Land Transfer Acceleration Act (S. 1466) that would allow private corporations to take ownership of tens of thousands of acres of the Tongass National Forest while sidestepping the normal public process.

The ancient, old-growth forest of the Tongass, its abundant runs of wild salmon, and the forest's spectacular wildlife are facing the most serious threats to their continued existence in decades. The Bush Administration's close ties to logging corporations and its relentless attacks on the nation's environmental laws have combined to pose a grave threat to the world's largest intact temperate rainforest.



Salmon Lake, Tongass National Forest. Photo © Dang Ngo/Greenpeace.

What You Can Do

Organizations working to protect the Tongass National Forest need citizens to contact their congressperson and senators and encourage them to oppose taxpayer subsidies for roads and timber sales, oppose the privatization of public lands and to protect the Tongass. When the Bush Administration revoked roadless area protections from the Tongass National Forest, it gave an outrageous gift to the logging industry. Instead of listening to the public's opposition to their plan to exempt the Tongass from the Roadless Rule, the Bush Administration chose to listen to its campaign contributors in the logging industry.

Now the Forest Service is moving ahead with money-losing, clearcut timber sales in the Tongass, and the American taxpayer is being asked to bankroll this waste. It's time to voice your outrage. Tell your members of Congress to take whatever action is necessary to ensure that your tax dollars are not wasted on logging the Tongass National Forest.

You can send a letter to your members of Congress from the Alaska Rainforest Campaign's website at www.akrain.org. To find out more information about the waste of taxpayer dollars in the Tongass National Forest, visit the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council's website at www.seacc.org.