

Written Public Testimony of Thomas Crafford
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On Behalf of State of Alaska

Submitted to the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands
September 29, 2015

Good morning, Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, Mr. Young, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Thomas Crafford and I am the Associate Director of State-Federal Relations with the Office of Governor Bill Walker, State of Alaska. On behalf of the Governor, I thank you for the opportunity to submit written and public testimony to the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands regarding Lessons for Better Management of our Federal Forests. I'd like to also acknowledge and thank Chris Maisch, the Alaska State Forester and Director of the Division of Forestry, who was primarily responsible for assembling these comments.

As you know, this is a timely topic considering the wildland fire season the nation has faced in the western states and Alaska this year. Federal land managers, particularly the Forest Service, need to become more proactive in addressing the overall health of our national forests to help reduce the risk from wildland fire and other environmental issues affecting these valued resources. The forests of this great country have contributed to our nation's well-being and provided for the many needs of our citizens, but many of our federal forestlands are in dire condition; drought, insect pests, lack of active forest management and a changing climate are all making inroads on the overall health and resilience of forestlands from east to west and north to south. It seems that each part of the country has its challenges.

At the same time our citizens and communities are depending more and more on our nation's forest resources. Clean and sufficient water for personal use and economic development is a critical service provided by trees and forests; clean air, forest-based economic opportunities, wildlife habitat, recreation and numerous other uses and benefits flow from this resource that is both sustainable, renewable and green.... very, very green! But in order to ensure these forests continue to provide for our nation, we must improve their current condition, and the way to do this is by cutting a tree.

Now, we all know the story of the Lorax and the Once-ler and his need to harvest the Truffula trees so he could make Thneeds. In the end, he went too far. He destroyed the very resource that he and his community needed to prosper. Today many communities, particularly in rural areas and near federal lands, are finding it difficult to prosper, but for the opposite reason. We don't actively manage our federal lands. We don't cut enough trees! I think that even the Lorax would agree that we need to find some middle ground, because we all need Thneeds. State and Tribal

governments from around the country provide good examples of what that middle ground can look like.

The State of Alaska embraces the concept of a Working Forest, which is further described as the utilization of forest resources to create jobs and healthy communities through active forest management. A healthy environment supports a strong social structure, which in-turn will support a robust economy. Our state and others use the phrase “Triple Bottom Line” to refer to this relationship, which is also described as sustainability. When any one of these elements is emphasized disproportionately, the other elements suffer in measures of quantity and quality. Unfortunately, in Alaska and other parts of the nation, an unbalanced relationship between the three “bottom lines” is causing major challenges for state and local governments and communities. Federal policy on national forest lands has shifted away from the Working Forest concept to disproportionately embrace a protection-oriented approach.

Alaska’s forest endowment is enormous. Alaska’s two national forests, the Tongass and the Chugach, are the largest in the country. Together they are nearly equal in size to the 52 forests located in the Forest Service Eastern Regions 8 and 9 – over 22 million acres. Unfortunately, the economic “bottom line” of Alaska’s federal forest endowment has been short-changed, to the detriment of Alaska’s communities.

This is illustrated by federal management of the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. The Tongass is the largest national forest and encompasses about 17 million acres of land. Not all of this land is suitable for timber management. Even so, through a series of Congressional withdrawals, Wilderness designations and administrative policy changes, the suited timber base available for management has declined to a mere 672 thousand acres – or 4% of the Tongass acreage. (NOTE: Nearly six million acres are managed as Wilderness in the Tongass. That is more Wilderness acreage than the Forest Service manages in Arizona, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Oregon combined (4.8 million acres).) By comparison, the state manages only a tiny fraction of forestland in Southeast Alaska, about 50 thousand acres in the Southeast State Forest (Figure 1).

The limitations mentioned, in combination with an unwieldy U.S. Forest Service policy, have led to a precipitous decline in timber volume offered for sale. As a consequence, logging and wood products employment has fallen from 4,600 jobs in 1990 to approximately 400 jobs in 2015. Since 2007, what remains of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska has survived from timber sale to timber sale (Figure 2). State timber sales have played a critical role and sustained the industry thru extremely low periods of federal sales.

Although its land holdings in Southeast Alaska constitute only about 8% of the timber base, the timber volume sold from State lands from FY06 to FY15 has constituted about 20% of the timber volume sold (Figure 1). Looked at another way, the State has sold about 65% of the 12.1

million board feet (MMBF) Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) from its Southeast Alaska lands, whereas the Tongass National Forest has sold only about 12% of its 267 MMBF AAC (Figure 3).

Timber sales on state land are governed by a number of laws, but the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA or Act) is of primary importance. The Act covers forest practices on state, municipal, and private land, including the Alaska Mental Health Trust and University of Alaska Trust lands. In place since 1989, the Act has been updated several times as new science becomes available. Scientific findings are reviewed in a two-step process via Alaska's Board of Forestry. The Act includes effectiveness and implementation components to ensure the best management practices (BMPs) remain current.

Lands designated as State Forest are managed per state forest purposes, as defined in Alaska statute (AS 41.17.200). The statute states, “[t]he primary purpose in the establishment of state forests is timber management that provides for the production, utilization, and replenishment of timber resources while allowing other beneficial uses of public land and resources.” The focus is on providing a consistent well managed supply of wood to private sector businesses that subsequently produce a range of products and services that will benefit local communities. The State has emphasized job creation over maximization of revenue in its management of state forests, but the two previously mentioned State Trusts follow the maximum fiscal return approach to ensure beneficiaries are well served.

In contrast, federal lands have numerous conditions and guidelines that prevent the USFS from generating significant revenue from forest management activities. The new 2012 National Planning Rule includes language that states: “the plan must provide for ecosystem services and multiple uses...” and contains additional language concerning integrated resource management planning that must address a long list of criteria, which in part include: aesthetic values, air quality, ecosystem services, habitat connectivity, scenery, view sheds, wilderness and other relevant resources and uses. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) also includes a section to “insure that timber will be harvested from the National Forest System lands only where the harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber.”

These conditions and numerous others complicate the timber sale process for the USFS and this often results in below cost sales that can't be sold or sales that are only marginally economic. A typical project can take up to five years to plan, prepare and offer, in a large part because of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. Here, state management would offer clear advantages. The State public process is less cumbersome which allows prompt reaction to market changes and the ability to offer long-term timber sales up to 20 years or longer, which encourages the investment of private capital and the construction of manufacturing facilities. A typically state timber sale takes about 18 months to plan and offer.

The state timber sale process includes reviews by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that can include site specific surveys for archeological or historic resources. If resources are found, the sale is adjusted to document, protect or preserve the noted resources.

State timber sales are planned with interagency involvement and both the Department of Fish and Game and Department of Environmental Conservation are key partners. The State FRPA is designed to protect fish habitat and water quality and each agency is given “due deference” under the law to their areas of expertise. The Department of Natural Resources provides overall coordination and administration of the Act. This “three legged stool” must have each agency support their share of the effort for the process to work. To demonstrate the effectiveness of the Act, let’s examine a few statistics. According to Anchorage Customs District data, over the period 2002-12 approximately \$1.65B in log value was exported from Alaska, primarily from Southeast Alaska. This wood came primarily from private (Alaska Native Corporations), municipal and state lands. During this same time period, a productive and sustainable wild salmon fishery has flourished. In 2014, Alaska Economic Trends published an in-depth look at the Southeast Alaska fisheries industry and found that. “Southeast Alaska has been the regional leader in both volume and value of the high-effort salmon fishery since 2011, thus generating the largest job counts”. And “The area’s longest continuous growth has been in salmon fisheries. Salmon harvesting reached new highs since 2000 in 2010, 2011 and 2013”.

The stream side buffers and other best management practices (BMPs) required by FRPA during timber harvest and road building play an important role in protecting fisheries (Figures 4 & 5). Alaska is not the only state with these types of BMPs as detailed in a recently published by the National Association of State Foresters that documents the various state programs to protect water quality. [http://www.stateforesters.org/sites/default/files/issues-and-policies-document-attachments/Protecting Water Quality through State Forestry BMPs FINAL.pdf](http://www.stateforesters.org/sites/default/files/issues-and-policies-document-attachments/Protecting%20Water%20Quality%20through%20State%20Forestry%20BMPs%20FINAL.pdf)

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to leave you with this thought: Alaska’s federal and state forests have the potential to be a model of sustainability, including environmental, social, and economic objectives. The “working forest” concept embraces diverse and broad objectives related to utilizing natural resources, providing jobs, stimulating local economies and supporting communities. These broad objectives have the potential to unify diverse stakeholders and interest groups.

The Forest Service is not able to solve this problem unless Congress provides relief from over burdensome regulations, confusing policy and litigation by third parties. These are all challenges to active management, and absent Congressional action, the needed change to the scope, scale and pace of forest management just won’t happen. As the Lorax would say, “unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.”

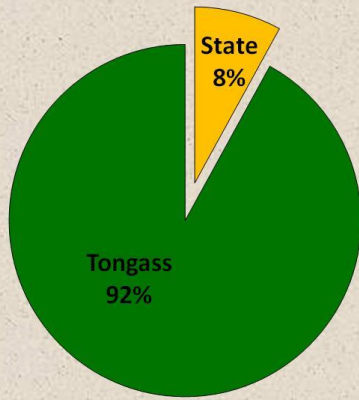
Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss federal forest management and scenarios for more active management. I urge Congress to continue this important conversation and provide new approaches and tools to address this national problem. Without action, communities near federal lands will continue to suffer, forest health issues from insects and disease will accelerate and the wildland fire challenges in the west will grow.

Mr. Chairman, there is a better alternative and you only need to look at how the States and Tribes of this great country are actively managing their forest resources and the impressive accomplishments they have achieved. We stand ready to continue this discussion. This concludes my testimony and I would be happy to address any questions the Committee may have.

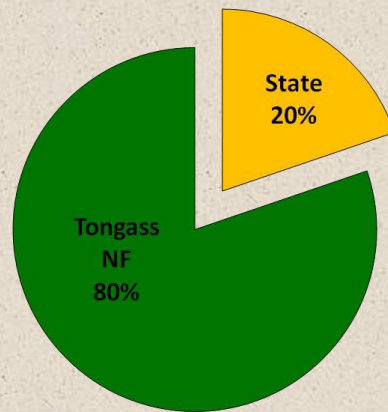
Figures

Timber Base and 10-Year Volume Sold
State Land in SSE vs Tongass NF, FY06-15
Figure 1

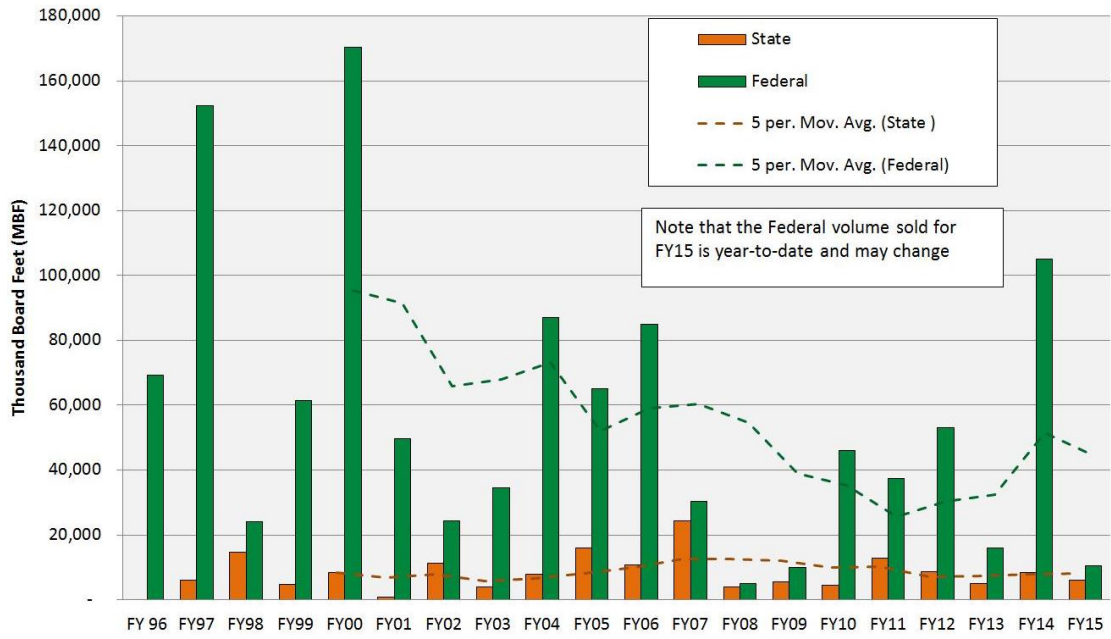
Timber Base
Percent Acres



10-year Volume Sold
FY06-FY15



State and Federal Timber Sale Volume Sold in SE Alaska, FY05-FY15
Thousand Board Feet
Dashed lines show 5-year rolling averages
FIGURE 2



Timber Harvest Units, Roads and Stream Buffers in Southeast Alaska Figure 4.

Stream side buffers to protect fish habitat and water quality can be readily seen in this harvest area. Note the variable widths of the buffers and locations in valley bottoms, mid-slope and in other locations as needed.



Typical Buffers in Eagle Creek Watershed



Salmon Spawning in Game Creek Watershed in areas with FRPA buffers



