

March 21, 2007

Mr. Forrest Cole, Forest Supervisor  
Tongass National Forest, U.S. Forest Service  
648 Mission Street  
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Attn: Forest Plan Adjustment

Dear Mr. Cole,

The Alaska State Chamber of Commerce strongly supports continued access to the Tongass National Forest for sustainable timber harvests. The State of Alaska has a long tradition of economic diversity and employment created by a state forest product's industry. While many individuals use the Tongass for a variety of recreational, personal and economic needs, any new plan should incorporate timber access for continuance of Alaska's forest products industry.

For many years, Southeast Alaska has had a strong forest products industry based on a steady sustainable supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Alaska forest industry employed close to 5000 people in well paying jobs. During that time, the jobs provided by the forest industry were often the only jobs available in Southeast Alaska's remotest communities. Without forest industry jobs, many of those communities continue to struggle with high-employment and little revenue to advance the community.

The State Chamber of Commerce believes strongly in a diversified economy particularly in Southeast Alaska. Without the timber industry, many Alaskans will be forced to leave their community or live without employment opportunities and face unknown hardships. A steady, sustainable timber supply can provide the jobs and the opportunities for many of Alaska's future workers. Current dropout rates in the Juneau, Anchorage, and the Mat-Su school districts range from 32-40 percent of children enrolled. Of those kids that go to college only 28% return back to college for a second year. Therefore, it is important that traditional job opportunities in the forest be available for Alaska's future workers. Jobs created by the forest services industry not only diversify the economy, but also can provide the jobs Alaska's children will need the most.

Again this year, the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce adopted a position in support of a strong timber industry. Without access to the Tongass National Forest, Alaska's forest-product's industry will have little room for growth or sustainability and likely see continued economic hardships for many of Southeast Alaska's timber communities.

The State Chamber believes that it is particularly important that Alaska's workers have future employment opportunities that round out Alaska's economy. Sustainable timber supply for Alaska's forest products industry can provide the jobs for Alaska's future workers, while diversifying Alaska's economy.

We look forward to a new plan including continued sustainable access for Alaska's forest product's industry.

Sincerely,

Wayne A. Stevens  
President/CEO