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Sent on behalf of the Tongass Advisory Committee

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Tongass Advisory Committee Close to Agreement on Young Growth Management on the Tongass

JUNEAU, Alaska – The Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) held its sixth meeting in Juneau from February 17-19, 2015. It was announced at the beginning of the meeting that, due to other pressing commitments, co-chair Wayne Benner was resigning from the Committee with deep regrets. Kate Troll, who to date has served as the alternate for the government sector, assumed his place as a full member. Les Cronk replaced Benner as co-chair, to serve along with co-chair Lynn Jungwirth.

The TAC continued robust discussions regarding possible Forest Plan Amendment recommendations to accelerate the transition to young growth forest management on the Tongass. The members are optimistic that they are close to agreement on a framework for the young growth harvest component of the Amendment. To ensure a successful transition, Committee members showed strong support for replacing old growth harvest with young growth harvest on a one-to-one volumetric basis. For harvest in more sensitive areas, they introduced the concept of “co-intent” – simultaneously achieving habitat objectives while increasing young growth timber harvest in those areas. The Forest Service will analyze the TAC’s draft young growth concepts for possible inclusion in the Forest Plan Amendment, recognizing there are additional recommendations required to come to consensus.

The Committee had very challenging, emotional discussions about the old growth harvest component. While they generally agreed that it would be helpful to have more clarity about the old growth harvest trajectory, they struggled with potential harvest volume and timing considerations to maintain a viable timber industry through the transition and beyond, as well as how to provide any assurance that whatever they might propose could actually be achieved. The old growth conversation concluded with a request to the Forest to assess two different old growth harvest scenarios that can be evaluated and discussed at a future meeting. They also recognized that agreement on this piece will be essential to concurrence on the whole package of recommendations. In spite of the difficult nature of the old growth debate, the members were able to discuss the options with candor, integrity and respect. Co-chair Lynn Jungwirth reflected, “For a first conversation about a very hard, monumentally difficult, age old problem, I was amazed it went as well as it did. I know it was frustrating at times, but I appreciate the tolerance of this group.” Newly named co-chair Les Cronk agreed, “It’s a challenging topic, and I’m thoroughly impressed with the investment and personal commitment of the people on this Committee to achieve this.”

In addition to talking about recommendations for the Plan Amendment, the Committee discussed institutional systems-level changes that must occur for the transition to young growth to succeed, and possible economic investments to help communities and businesses prepare for the changes that are coming. They also recognized the critical importance of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. These topics will all be dealt with in more detail in upcoming meetings.

The members thanked the individuals who commented during this meeting, and encouraged community members and other members of the public to continue participating through the public comment process – both in writing and in person.

The next TAC meeting is scheduled for March 25-27, 2015 in Juneau, Alaska. The meeting was originally slated for Wrangell, but was moved to Juneau to enable participation by a full quorum of TAC members. Members expressed frustration about the change in venue, although they recognized the necessity of having a quorum of representatives from each interest sector, and indicated a strong desire to try to hold future sessions in other communities if possible. For more information about the Tongass Advisory Committee, visit <http://www.merid.org/tongassadvisorycommittee>.