



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Tongass Forest Plan Revision Status

Erin Mathews, Tongass National Forest, Plan Revision Coordinator
October 17, 2024



Plan Revision

- Timeline
- Assessment Phase
- Need for Change
- Next Steps
- National Old Growth Amendment
- Forest Management and Timber
Draft Assessment Findings



Anticipated Timeline



**Assessment
2024/2025**

Draft assessment
Draft Wild and scenic rivers inventory
Draft Wilderness inventory
Potential species of conservation concern.

**Plan Development
2025**

Preliminary need to change
Draft Wilderness evaluation
Draft Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility
Engage: Management areas, plan components, desired conditions

**National Environmental
Policy Act (NEPA) Processes**

Proposed Action
Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

**Finalize Plan / EIS
Objection Period / Record of
Decision
2027-2028**

Final Plan
Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
Objections process



WATERSHEDS

AIR, SOIL, WATER
RESOURCES

TIMBER
MANAGEMENT

What stresses will impact the area?

Social, cultural, and economical conditions

Evaluate Existing Information

CARBON STOCKS

CULTURAL &
HISTORIC RESOURCES

THREATENED &
ENDANGERED SPECIES

AREAS OF TRIBAL
IMPORTANCE

What are the benefits of the Tongass?

CABINS & OTHER
STRUCTURES

RECREATION

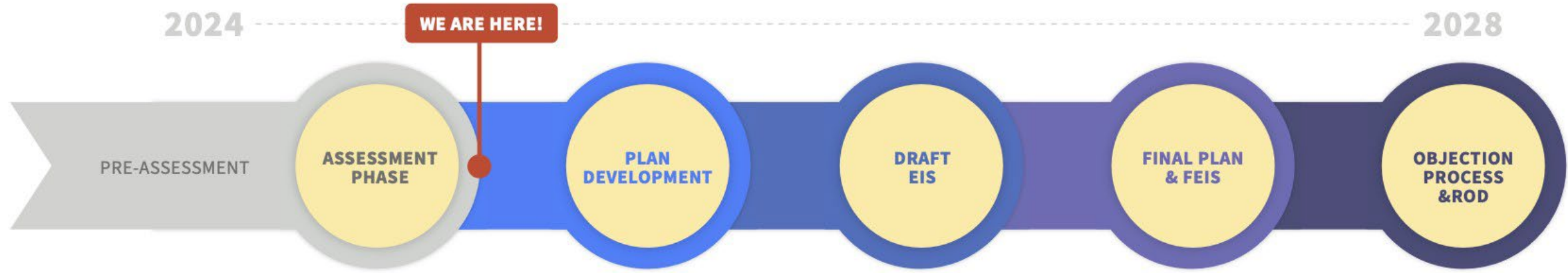
MINING, HYDROPOWER,
ETC

Need for Change?

- New scientific information and methodology?
- New threats to the resource?
- Conditions have changed?
- Use and demand have changed?
- New policies/regulations?



 **WHERE WE ARE HEADED**





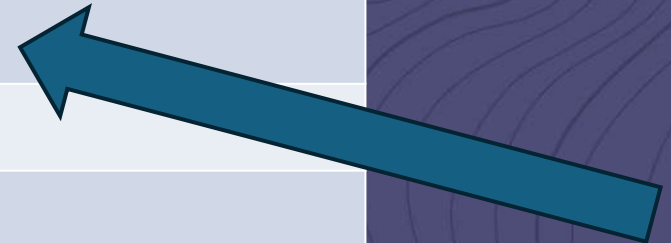
2025 Engagement

- Developing Plan Content
 - Desired Conditions
 - Objectives
 - Standards and Guidelines
 - Suitability of Lands
 - Location of Management Areas



Upcoming Comment Periods

Stage of Plan Revision	Product
Assessment	Community Workshops: Engagement on Vision for Tongass
	Comments on Parallel Process Products
	Draft Assessment Report
Need to Change	Preliminary Need to Change
Plan Development (Proposed Action)	Draft proposed plan
Analysis / Environmental Impact Statement	Draft Environmental Impact Statement & Monitoring Plan
	Final Environmental Impact Statement / Draft Record of Decision
Monitoring	Draft Monitoring Program



**January
2025**



Get Involved!

Get Involved!

We have many opportunities for you to get involved in our land management plan revision process! Whether you are looking for more information, want to share information or help develop a part of the plan, or are looking for opportunities to comment on document releases, you can find it all here. You can sign up for our mailing list to receive periodic updates about the plan revision process. Have a question for us? Send a message to our [plan revision inbox](#) and a team member will get back to you.

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Plan Revision Inbox: TongassPlanRevision@usda.gov

The image is a composite. The left side shows a sunset over a mountain range, with the sky transitioning from orange to yellow and the mountains appearing as dark silhouettes. The right side shows a forest of tall, mature trees with thick, reddish-brown trunks and green foliage. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the sunset image.

National Old-Growth Amendment (NOGA) Overview



Timeline



April 2022:
President Biden
issues Executive
Order 14072



June 2022:
USDA Secretarial
memo identifies
actions to restore
forests and improve
climate resilience



December 2023:
USDA issued the
Notice of Intent to
prepare an
Environmental Impact
Statement



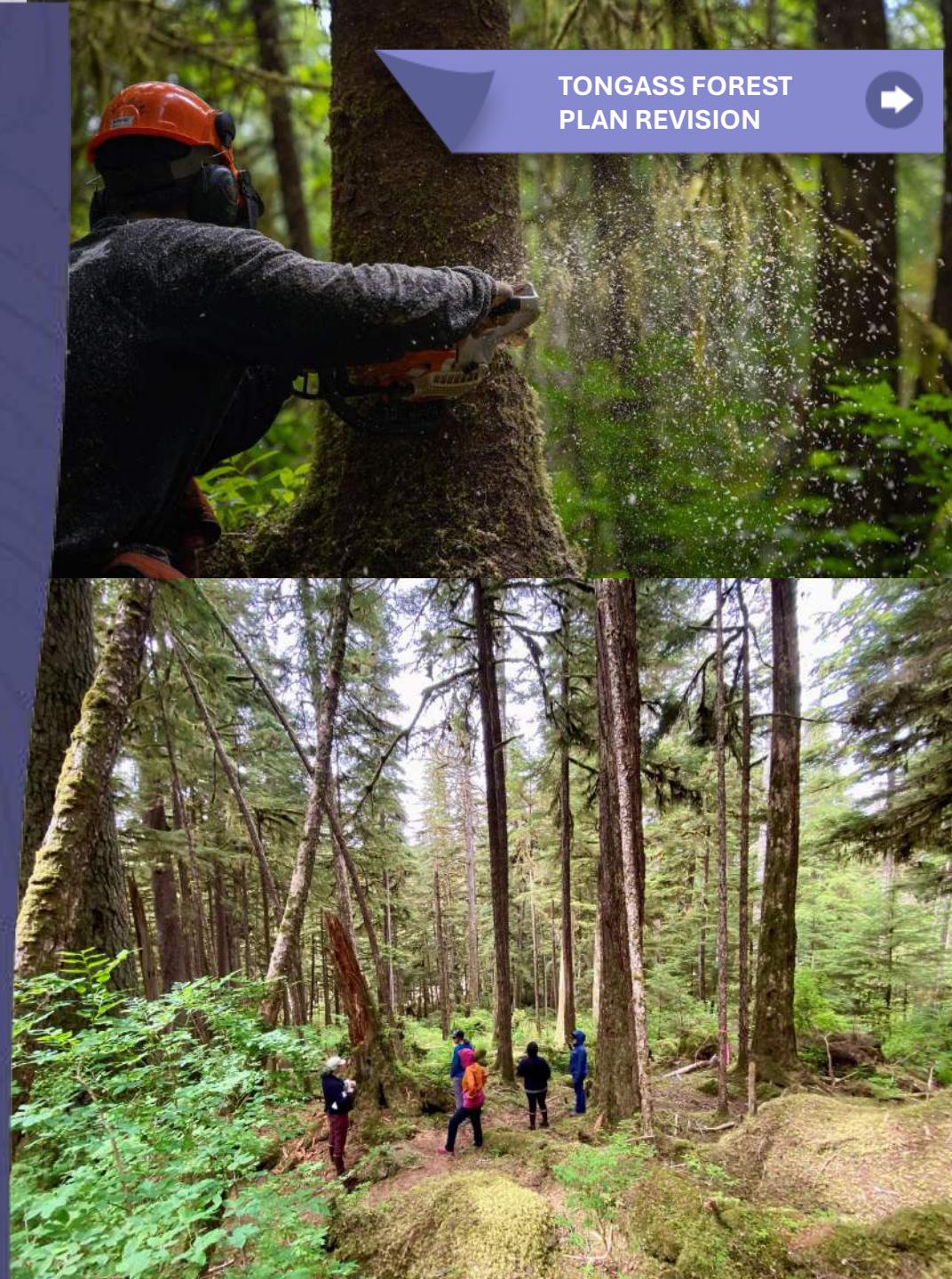
June 2024:
Forest Service
published Draft
Environmental Impact
Statement



September 2024
Engagements
continue. Comment
period closed on
9/20.

Amendment Intent

- Improve the retention and recruitment of old-growth forests and improve resilience to wildfire, insects and disease
- Strengthen existing and future old growth conditions to adapt to changing climate
- Incorporate Indigenous knowledge for the stewardship of old growth
- Develop locally-informed monitoring and management strategies and promote local collaboration and flexibility
- Promote local decision making on mature forest management and stewardship into old growth where appropriate
- Use forest or regional definitions for old growth





Next Steps

- Analysis of comments from 90-day comment period (closed September 20)
- Compliance review of other federal laws such as Endangered Species Act and National Historic Preservation Act
- Tribal engagement/consultation and cooperating agency meetings
- Development of the final environmental impact statement





NOGA vs Plan Revision

- We'll know more in December and next year.
- If signed, direction in the NOGA FEIS would amend the current Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. That would become the No Action alternative.



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Forest Management and Timber

Deanna Engelmann, Pacific Planning Service Group, Silviculturist
October 17, 2024



Assessment Findings – *Forest Management and Timber*

FSH 1909.12, Chapter 10, 13.33 – Timber

The Assessment should identify and evaluate available information about how timber harvest and production contribute to social, economic, and ecological sustainability.

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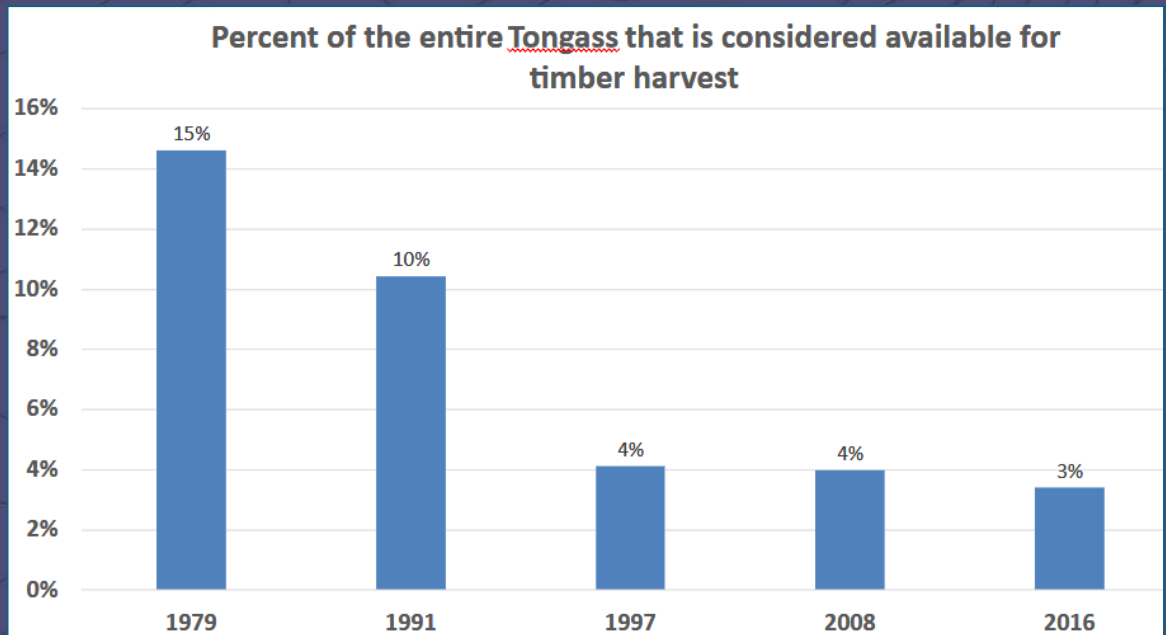
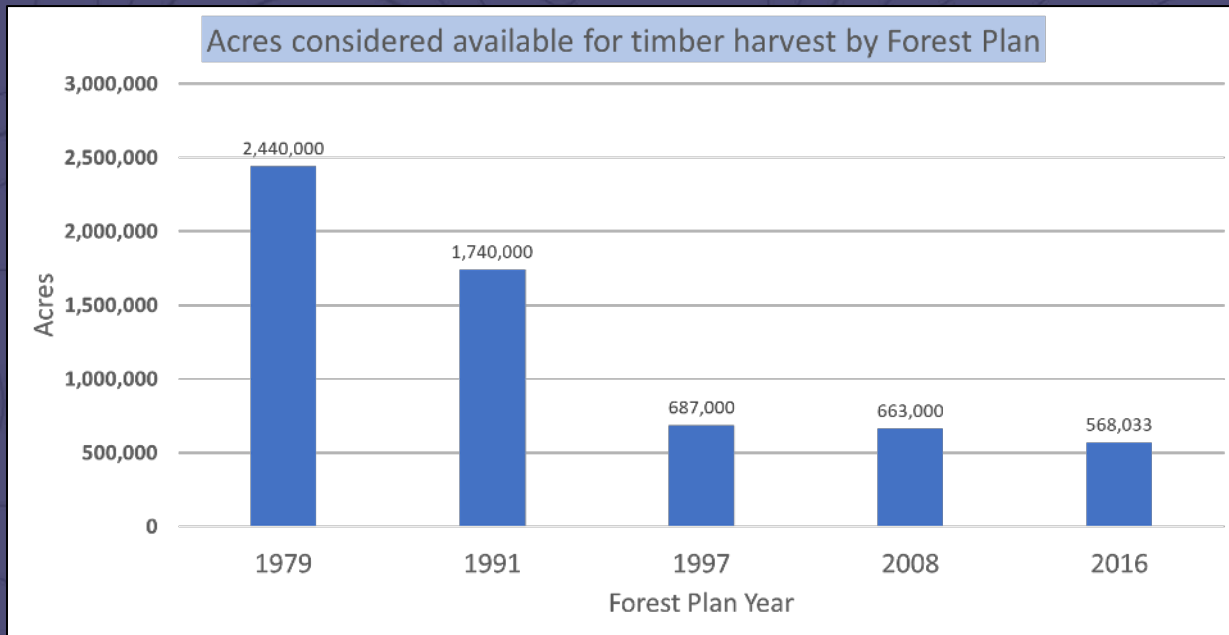
2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan – Timber

- Accelerate the transition from old growth to young-growth forest management, from 32 years under the 2008 Forest Plan to 16 years, while maintaining a viable timber industry.
- During the 15 years after plan approval, offer increasing annual volumes of economically viable young-growth timber. Old-growth timber harvest would gradually be reduced to an average of 5 million board feet (MMBF) annually, to support Southeast Alaska mills.



Assessment Findings – *Forest Management and Timber*

Acres Suitable for Timber Production by Forest Plan	
1997	687,00 acres
2008	663,000 acres
2016	568,000 acres (333,464 young-growth acres)





Assessment Findings – *Forest Management and Timber*

- ❖ The timber industry is important to the diversity of industries for the communities of Southeast Alaska.
- ❖ Free use and non-timber product use has been ongoing and remains an important aspect of Southeast Alaska way of life.
- ❖ The continued and ongoing use of even-aged harvest is an important management tool for cedar regeneration, minimizing windthrow impacts, minimizing the need for roadbuilding across the landscape, and provides an important efficient and economic advantage.



Assessment Findings – *Forest Management and Timber*

- Continued small-scale harvest of old growth is essential for maintaining many of the small, multi-generational mill owner and operators across the region
- Continued access to old-growth is essential for preserving and maintaining cultural traditions important to communities of Southeast Alaska



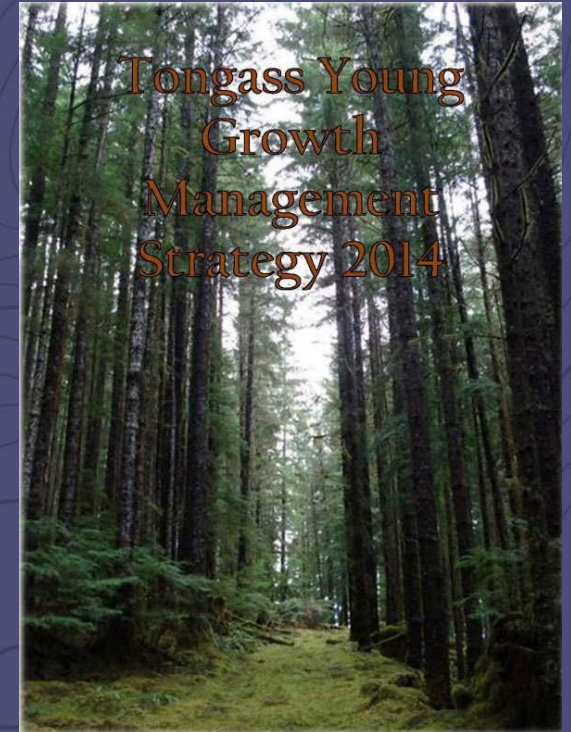
Assessment Findings – *Forest Management and Timber*

- ❖ While a reduction of old growth harvest has happened more quickly than anticipated, increases in young growth harvest have been slower than anticipated. Some reasons why:
 - Shifting priorities from the Secretary's Office affecting the ability to offer more young-growth (projects have been put on pause and cancelled)
 - Challenges in completing timber-related NEPA
 - Litigation, national shifts in priorities
 - Loss of internal Forest Service planning team capacity
 - Land transfers that included commercial-sized young-growth



Need for Change - *Forest Management and Timber*

- To meet the intent of 16-year transition under 2016 Forest Plan Amendment, the Tongass needs consistency in program direction and prioritization, an increase of planning capacity, and a sovereign ability to make project-level decisions that leverage flexibilities around young-growth management direction of 2016 amendment and those specifically authorized in Tongass Young Growth Management.
- There is a need for flexible management options to address:
 - Emergent forest health issues such as insect and disease outbreaks
 - Emergent unknown and uncertain impacts of climate





Need for Change – *Forest Management and Timber*

- **There is a need to update lands suitable for timber production, per Section 219.11(a)1 of the 2012 planning Rule, due to:**
 - **Land exchanges that have occurred since 2016**
 - **Land transfers since 2016**
 - **Updated vegetation mapping & climate change forecasts**
 - **Pending NOGA direction and potential changes to Roadless Rule with a forthcoming change in Administration**



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