

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

October 15, 2014

Re: Scientific support for completion of old-growth logging transition on the Tongass rainforest by the end of the Obama Administration

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As scientists with extensive professional experience in fields related to natural resource management and forest ecosystems, we write to express our full support for a transition out of old-growth logging on the world-class Tongass rainforest in southeast Alaska and strongly urge its completion before the end of the Obama Administration.

"The Tongass National Forest is a national treasure. Today, I am outlining a series of actions by USDA and the Forest Service that will protect the old-growth forests of the Tongass while preserving forest jobs in southeast Alaska. I am asking the Forest Service to immediately begin planning for the transition to harvesting second growth timber while reducing old-growth harvesting over time."
July 3, 2013 Press Release, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

At 16.8 million acres, the Tongass is the nation's largest national forest. Its remoteness, its relative intactness, and its extensive and productive old-growth forests (at nearly 6 million acres) make it the ideal target for large-landscape conservation.¹ The Tongass is one of only six relatively intact temperate rainforests globally.² It sustains nearly 8% of the nation's carbon on just 2% of the nation's forest base.³ It protects world-class salmon runs surpassed by none.² Also dependent on the Tongass forest's vast remaining old-growth forests are the region's most important economic sectors including tourism and commercial fishing, as well as subsistence use of its prodigious fish and wildlife resources.⁴

We applaud your directive to transition the Tongass out of old growth logging and the Forest Service's statement in the Federal Register Notice of Intent (NOI) of May 27, 2014, that "to conserve the Tongass National Forest [the agency] must speed the transition away from old-growth timber harvesting." In addition to traditional conservation goals, preserving the forest's remaining old growth will help limit the impacts of global climate change. Recent studies have demonstrated the area's nationally significant carbon stores are best maintained by protecting its old-growth forests,⁵ and its vegetation is likely to remain relatively stable compared to inland

¹Albert, D.M., and J.W. Schoen. 2013. Use of historical logging patterns to identify disproportionately logged ecosystems within temperate rainforests of southeastern Alaska. *Cons Bio*. 27:774-784.

²DellaSala, D.A. et al. 2011. Temperate and boreal rainforests of the Pacific Coast of North America. Pp. 42-81 In D.A. DellaSala (ed), *Temperate and boreal rainforests of the world: ecology and conservation*. Island Press: Washington, D.C.

³http://www.usda.gov/blog/usda/entry/h2_the_urgent_need_to 12.17.2009

⁴Crone, L.K., and J.R. Mehrkens. 2013. Indigenous and commercial uses of the natural resources of the North Pacific Rainforest with a focus on southeast Alaska and Haida Gwaii. Pp. 89-126 In G.H Orians and J.W. Schoen (eds), *North Pacific Temperate Rainforests Ecology and Conservation*. University of Washington Press:Seattle.

⁵Leighty, W.W. et al. 2006. Effects of management on carbon sequestration in forest biomass in southeast Alaska. *Ecosystems* 9:1051-1065.

areas as the region's climate shifts, due to moderating maritime influences and the lack of wildfire disturbances.⁶

Because of the Tongass' unique contribution to sequestering and storing carbon over the long term, protecting its old-growth forests would be a sustaining legacy contribution to meeting the goals of President Barack Obama's June 2013 Climate Action Plan and November 2013 Climate Change Executive Order. Swift administrative action to end industrial-scale old-growth logging on the Tongass would stand as a much-needed model for other nations to follow by conserving their own carbon- and wildlife-rich old-growth forest ecosystems.

Thank you very much for considering our views on a matter of urgent global significance.

Sincerely (affiliations are listed for identification purposes only),

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⁶DellaSala, D.A. et al. in review. Climate change may trigger broad shifts in North America's Pacific coastal rainforests.

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