

## FORESTS:

### Final EIS would end Tongass old-growth logging in 16 years

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The Obama administration released its latest environmental impact statement and recommendations Friday for ending old-growth logging in the Tongass National Forest.

The Forest Service's **EIS** calls for ending old-growth logging in the 16.7-million-acre southeast Alaska forest in the next 16 years.

The agency will take comments on the report over the next 60 days.

The administration says 16 years is the right length of time to gradually move toward younger-growth harvests, giving trees time to grow while meeting a directive from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to move away from old-growth logging. In reaching its final recommendation, the agency picked from five alternatives.

The recommendation drew immediate fire from the Geos Institute, an Oregon-based conservation group, which said its research suggests the Forest Service could move much faster, harvesting adequate timber to move out of old-growth areas by 2020.

That could be achieved by cutting growth on stands that were clearcut in the 1950s, the group said.

"The Tongass absorbs about 8% of the nation's carbon dioxide pollution annually -- far greater than any other national forest," said Dominick DellaSala, chief scientist at Geos' Forest Legacy Program, in a news release. "The Forest Service has become a rogue agency ignoring the administration's own climate change policies at the expense of one of the world's most expansive and carbon-dense temperate rainforests."

While Geos has called the plan too slow, the service faces pressure from Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to conduct a more extensive inventory of young growth before changing the forest management plan. The effect would be to stop the agency for now, although she has said her intention isn't necessarily to slow the transition away from old-growth clearcutting.

In its proposal, the Forest Service projects 46 million board feet of timber will be required through the next 15 years. In the first decade, most would be from old growth, with more being produced from young growth in later years, the agency said.

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