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Media Contact: Dominick DellaSala, GEOS Institute | Dominick@geosinstitute.org 541-482-4459 x 302; [541-621-7223](tel:541-621-7223)

Obama Administration Should Protect Tongass National Forest Old Growth To Achieve Urgent Climate Change Goals

–Tongass Logging Plan Ignores Fast Exit from Old-growth Logging

– Agency Relies on Old School Forestry Tactics

– Contradicts Secretary of State John Kerry’s and President Obama’s Climate Statements

Ashland, OR – The release of the Forest Service’s old-growth logging plan (Final Environmental Impact Statement) for the Tongass National Forest stalls urgent climate change protections and runs counter to the Obama administration’s climate change directives. The plan contradicts the US-led Paris Climate Change Agreement that includes measures to protect vast amounts of carbon stored in forests to help head off dangerous global warming. The Forest Service’s plan calls for continued logging of old growth trees for another 16 years, which threatens 43,000 acres of Tongass old-growth rainforest. The unnecessarily long timeframe will release the equivalent emissions of 4 million vehicles annually over the next 100 years at a time when nations are looking to cut back on emissions.

“On the heels of news last March that global carbon dioxide levels exceeded the 400 parts per million mark, old-growth forests on the Tongass, the nation’s most carbon dense forest, are being clearcut. The Tongass absorbs about 8% of the nation’s carbon dioxide pollution annually – far greater than any other national forest,” said Dr. Dominick DellaSala, Chief Scientist at Geos Institute’s Forest Legacy Program. He added, “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.”

DellaSala and other Tongass forest experts stress two key points:

- 1) Based on independent forest inventory and modeling studies conducted by Geos partner (Mater Engineering Ltd), so-called second-growth trees (previously clearcut in the 1950s but since regrown) can meet projected timber volume demand by 2020, a much faster timeframe than the Forest Service’s longer transition.
- 2) The estimated health and economic costs of carbon emissions from increased logging on the Tongass to Alaska citizens will exceed projected timber revenues by a factor of at least ten by mid-century.

The agency also has refused to complete an already-designed second growth economic study designed by Mater Engineering Ltd—with industry participation—to demonstrate marketability of locally processed young growth.

US government agencies should be in synch on tackling the climate change crisis. Just last week, Secretary of State Kerry issued a joint statement with Norway's Environment Minister that said:

"The science is clear: conserving, restoring and sustainably managing the world's natural forests is critical to achieving a safe, secure, and sustainable world."

President Obama also visited Alaska last declaring it the nation's signpost on global warming and stressing urgent international action to address a pending climate change crisis.

Spokespeople:

Dr. Dominick A. DellaSala – Geos Institute; [541-482-4459 x 302](tel:541-482-4459); [541-621-7223](tel:541-621-7223)

Chief Scientist at the Ashland, Oregon-based Geos Institute and editor of Temperate and Boreal Rainforests of the World, Ecology and Conservation.

<http://www.forestlegacies.org/programs/tongass-rainforest>

Jim Furnish – Deputy Chief Forest Service, retired; [240-271-1650](tel:240-271-1650)

Retired Forest Service Deputy Chief and Supervisor of the Siuslaw National Forest (Oregon). Furnish has experienced forest logging transition that is similar to what's needed in the Tongass. During his tenure, the Siuslaw faced a 1994 court-ordered transition over the spotted owl listing, which led to the quick transition into younger forests and restoration. According to Furnish, timber supply is stable without controversial old-growth logging.

Catherine Mater – Mater Engineering; [541-753-7335](tel:541-753-7335)

Catherine Mater of Oregon-based Mater Engineering Ltd. In 2015, Mater spearheaded the most intensive timber cruises ever conducted on the Tongass National Forest, focusing on 55-year second growth stands. Pilot projects are currently underway with Alaska industry partners to log in 2016 representative samplings of 55-year second growth stands to determine volume, grade recovery, and range of value-add products that can be manufactured.

See <http://forestlegacies.org/programs/tongass-rainforest> for reports on emissions and Tongass second growth availability