

Public Comment for Central Tongass Project #53098; Submitted Sept. 14, 2019

Let's call this proposed project what it really is – a large-scale timber sale of 150 million board feet of timber over a 15-year period with little to no public input and potentially devastating consequences for wildlife living in the proposed sale areas. Local communities will also be negatively impacted as recreational activities are curtailed or eliminated. Tourism dollars for these communities will cease to exist since nobody is going to want to view clear-cut logged lands when they could instead be viewing stunning scenic vistas, fishing, hiking, birding and wildlife watching, or taking photos.

Many of the proposed timber sale units will be in areas previously set aside and some of these areas now provide the only remaining habitat for wildlife such as the Pacific Marten, a solitary medium-sized forest carnivore that resides in the old-growth forested lands of Southeast Alaska's Kuiu Island. Martens rely on old-growth forests for food, shelter, raising their young, and protection from predators like eagles. Pacific Martens occur only on three islands within the Tongass National Forest and on Kuiu Island, the Pacific and American Martens interbreed, making this population even more distinct than other Marten populations residing within the Tongass National Forest. The project itself cites "major impacts" to the Kuiu Marten population and it is not unreasonable to conclude that old-growth logging could lead to extinction of the Kuiu Marten population during the life of the project.

The proposed Central Tongass Project is also attempting to decrease "Scenic Integrity Objectives" that currently require the Forest Service to provide scenic view sheds where logging is not visible from certain roads and waterways in Southeast Alaska.

One of the islands most at risk in the Central Tongass Project is Kuiu Island. Proposed timber harvest is focused on the north and east sides of the island where the northernmost populations of U.S. western red cedar are located. These remnant trees are up to 800 years old. Kuiu is a Tlingit name. The island has no permanent human settlements, but is a traditionally and culturally important landscape home to the Kake Tribe of Alaska. They are actively restoring Indigenous names to places on Kuiu Island while timber sales are planned in the same bays and estuaries.

Each island in the Central Tongass Project boasts unique wildlife and recreation values, and irreplaceable cultural significance. These values are mentioned, but not protected under the current alternatives in the Central Tongass Project. Now is not the time to be moving forward with a project that will clear-cut 150 million board feet of timber, for an already heavily subsidized industry, and leave devastating environmental and cultural consequences in its wake.

Submitted by: Mary Sinker, [REDACTED]; Sept. 14, 2019