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# South Revilla old growth logging proposal moves forward in Tongass

September 9, 2020 by Jacob Resneck, CoastAlaska (<https://www.ktoo.org/author/jacob-resneck/>)



*The western shores of Carroll Inlet in 2015. This region about 10 miles northeast of Ketchikan is part of the South Revilla project area, where the U.S. Forest Service proposes to offer more than 5,000 acres of old growth Tongass National Forest to commercial loggers. (Photo by Larry Edwards/Alaska Rainforest Defenders)*

The federal government proposes to offer more than 5,000 acres of old growth forest in Tongass National Forest for commercial logging. While conservationists are sounding the alarm over the project near Ketchikan, the timber industry has raised questions over whether it would be viable.

The U.S. Forest Service says the [South Revilla project \(https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53477&exp=overview\)](https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53477&exp=overview) is intended to support around 300 jobs regionally. The timber sales would be over the next 15 years and would be a mix of cutting old and young stands of trees.

The sales would be largely in the Carroll Inlet area, a patchwork of federal and state lands mixed with swaths already clear-cut by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

“We can’t do much about what’s happening with the mental health trust,” said Larry Edwards of Alaska Rainforest Defenders in Sitka. “But on the public lands that either the state or the federal government own, we shouldn’t be doing any more logging in this area at all.”

The Forest Service’s [draft environmental review \(https://krbd-org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/108739\\_FSPLT3\\_5343461.pdf\)](https://krbd-org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/108739_FSPLT3_5343461.pdf) says removing old-growth habitat may further fragment the forest, eliminating connectivity important to deer, wolf, mountain goat, marten and bear in an area used by subsistence hunters. According to the review, the timber sales would decrease deer habitat, the primary prey for Alexander archipelago wolves, for 150 years or longer. A petition was recently filed to have Southeast Alaska’s wolves [listed under the Endangered Species Act \(https://www.ktoo.org/2020/07/18/endangered-species-petition-filed-for-southeast-alaska-wolves/\)](https://www.ktoo.org/2020/07/18/endangered-species-petition-filed-for-southeast-alaska-wolves/)t.

But the Forest Service justifies the work, saying a steady supply of economic timber is needed to support Southeast Alaska’s forest products industry.

“The Forest Service is going back in, and they’re just picking out isolated areas of old growth that are left over,” Edwards said.

Law prevents the agency from offering timber sales that appraise negative — that is, they would cost more to prep for sale than the agency would get in return.

The agency says it’s already spent about \$5.1 million in planning and preparation for this project. Offering a timber sale would cost another \$8 million or so. But using its own numbers, all of the proposed timber sales would put the agency in the red — which it can’t do by law.

It’s also unclear whether there would be any takers under current market conditions.

The Alaska Forest Association commented last year that the South Revilla project overlaps with a previous 2,200-acre Saddle Lakes project that was aborted over lack of interest.

“Why waste time analyzing and marking harvest units that have no hope of being financially viable?” [the timber industry group wrote last summer \(https://krbd-org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/108739\\_FSPLT3\\_5343461.pdf\)](https://krbd-org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/108739_FSPLT3_5343461.pdf).

Eric Nichols of Alcan Forest Products is skeptical the South Revilla project will find a buyer.

“You can’t buy it just to lose money on it,” he said.

Nichols’ company exports raw logs to Asia. The U.S. trade war with China has led to a lot of uncertainty, as tariffs are scheduled to be reimposed next year for his Ketchikan-based firm.

So timber operators may not be willing to incur the risk right now.

“That’s going to make the decision to buy anything very difficult,” Nichols said, “trying to understand what’s going to happen between the U.S. and China.”

Notice of a draft environmental impact statement was published in the federal register on Friday, Sept. 4. That triggers a 45-day comment period (<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=53477>) to weigh in on the project.

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