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Strategy for Southeast Alaska Bridge Timber Supply

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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DIVISION OF FORESTRY

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Background

In a July 15, 2021 announcement from the US Department of Agriculture, Secretary Vilsack stated unambiguously that the harvest of old growth timber from the Tongass National Forest will cease immediately. The announcement was largely silent on timber sales for young growth timber. This sudden stop to all timber harvest from the Tongass National Forest will severely impact the timber industry in the area, which has come to rely on a steady supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest. (The current Management Plan for this National Forest commits to a harvest level of 46 million board feet annually.)

Path Forward

The Division of Forestry has committed to assisting the Governor's Bridge Timber program in southern Southeast Alaska (Ketchikan area). This plan will accelerate DOF's timber sales from a sustained yield of 9 million board feet per year to an estimated 14 million board feet per year. To meet that objective, DOF will use up its backlog of annual allowable cut on the Southeast State Forest and General Use lands and develop sales on land classifications that are not constrained by annual allowable cut: lands planned for settlement, for example. The intent of the plan is to provide timber volume to industry stakeholders until a viable and sustainable supply of young growth timber is available for harvest.

The Division of Forestry proposes a joint effort between State agencies to support the Southeast Alaska timber industry, large and small, predominantly with old growth timber for the next five years. It is assumed that the USFS will offer some old growth timber in small sales and the Mental Health Trust will offer its remaining timber inventory for sale. At the end of this period, the USDA Forest Service projects that meaningful amounts of young growth timber sales from the Tongass National Forest will be operationally viable.

In addition to making at least 14 million board feet available annually for the next 5 years, the Division of Forestry also commits to continuing to develop efficiencies in its timber sale process. This will include using contractors, non-permanent employees and a purchaser layout process to conduct associated field work.

The Division's timber sales fill an essential role in keeping the timber industry and associated jobs in Southeast Alaska alive. The timber industry in the rest of the state, especially in the Interior, is almost exclusively dependent on timber sales from State lands developed and implemented by Division foresters.