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FOREST SERVICE:

Old-growth logging sale halted pending review of impacts to wolves

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The Forest Service has decided to halt the sale of old-growth trees in Alaska's Tongass National Forest while it conducts a supplemental review of how the project could affect at-risk wolves.

The decision yesterday by Regional Forester Beth Pendleton drew praise from a handful of environmental groups that have opposed the agency's Big Thorne project, which would allow the harvest of more than 6,000 acres of old-growth logging in the 17-million-acre forest.

Pendleton ordered Tongass Supervisor Forrest Cole to conduct a supplemental information report to ensure a "hard look" is given to the issue.

"This is a clear win," said Larry Edwards, a resident of the region and a forest campaigner for Greenpeace, which appealed the agency's July approval of the project along with four other groups. "The outcome is still uncertain, but no timber from the project can be sold until incomplete analysis of Big Thorne's impact to deer, hunters, wolves is remedied."

Pendleton said she ordered the appeal based on "new information" from David Person, an expert on southeast Alaska's Alexander Archipelago wolf. Person said the logging project "represents the final straw that will break the back" of the wolf-deer predator-prey relationship on Prince of Wales Island.

Other groups including the Alaska Wilderness League, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice, Audubon Alaska, the Sierra Club and the Sitka Conservation Society also cheered the decision.

"The Forest Service has finally realized that logging does not happen in a vacuum," said Cindy Shogan, executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League. "We are appreciative that they are going to take a closer look that the impacts of Big Thorne on deer and wolf populations, but what about the impact on southeast Alaska's economy?"

The Forest Service's decision comes days after several dozen House Democrats wrote a letter to the agency opposing the Big Thorne sale and encouraging the agency to hasten its Tongass transition to second-growth harvests (*[E&E Daily](#)*, Sept. 26).

The logging announcement in July drew support from Alaska's congressional delegation, which argued that local mills badly need new supplies and young growth trees are not yet old enough for commercial harvest (*[Greenwire](#)*, July 2). That same week, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack issued a [memo](#) saying that within 15 years, the "vast majority" of timber harvested on the 17-million-acre forest, the nation's largest, will be young growth (*[Greenwire](#)*, July 5).

The Big Thorne project is expected to generate roughly 650 jobs in logging, sawmilling, transportation and supporting businesses. It will also offer 2,299 acres of young-growth timber.