

# Senate Panel Votes to Topple Restrictions

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A Senate panel, determined to accelerate the pace of logging in one of the world's largest remaining temperate rain forests, yesterday approved legislation sharply limiting the U.S. Forest Service's flexibility in managing Alaska's Tongass National Forest.

On a voice vote, the Interior subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee directed Forest Service officials to implement a four-year-old management plan for the Tongass, effectively blocking Clinton administration efforts to revise the plan to reduce logging and add protections for fish and wildlife.

The overall effect of the legislation, if eventually enacted by Congress, would be to increase logging in the 17 million-acre Tongass by more than 75 percent over what is being planned by the Forest Service. That would return the annual harvest in the Tongass to levels achieved before 1989, when Congress enacted legislation reforming timber practices in the Southeast Alaska forest, where two pulp companies had enjoyed 50-year contracts for vast quantities of cheap spruce, hemlock and cedar.

Approved as the panel completed action on a \$12.1 billion spending bill for the Interior Department and related agencies, the amendment offered by Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) is one part of a larger legislative strategy by

the newly powerful Alaska congressional delegation to exercise more control over the nation's largest national forest, which stretches over 500 miles of Alaska's panhandle.

Angered by Clinton administration efforts to reduce logging levels and impose greater protections for salmon, wolves and other wildlife, the three-member Alaska delegation is moving on several fronts to assist the region's timber economy.

President Clinton plans to sign legislation today cutting spending that had been approved for 1995 that includes provisions preventing the Forest Service from establishing habitat protection areas for some wildlife on the Tongass and nullifying court injunctions on some timber sales. And the delegation has introduced other

Post

## on Logging in Alaska National Forest

legislation overturning many of the reforms in the 1989 Tongass Timber Reform Act, mandating higher timber harvests and opening protected areas to logging.

The multi-pronged effort by Stevens, Sen. Frank H. Murkowski (R) and Rep. Don Young (R)—who hold key chairmanships and appropriations posts in the GOP-controlled Congress—has left environmentalists scrambling to combat what they view as an all-out assault on the ecologically rich Tongass.

"The Alaska delegation is looking out for a single industry and in the process destroying a national treasure," said Nicholas P. Lapham of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Stevens responded: "We're just tired of spending more and more

money and doing more and more planning and losing jobs."

As under the House plan, the Senate bill would continue the long-standing moratorium on oil drilling in much of the outer continental shelf.

Later in the day, Stevens, who chairs the defense appropriations subcommittee, offered a 1996 defense bill that contained few surprises. The \$242.7 billion measure closely follows a House version that goes to the floor next week. Unlike that bill, however, it does not provide additional money to expand the B-2 bomber program and instead funds the building of a third Seawolf submarine. It also provides \$174 million more than the House for the Army's top-priority Comanche helicopter and proposes funding four

rather than two DDG-51 destroyers as the House has suggested.

Stevens's bill provides \$300 million more than the administration requested for ballistic missile defense, an addition Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) said could cause controversy because of its possible violation of this country's anti-ballistic missile treaty.

Across the Capitol, the House approved an additional \$50 million in 1996 funding for domestic violence programs in a \$27.6 billion bill funding the departments of Commerce, Justice and State. After adding the original \$75 million budgeted and \$40 million to be set aside from the crime trust fund, the money nearly equaled the \$175 million authorized under the Violence Against Women Act passed last year.