

# Commercial Uses of the Tongass: Past, Present and Future

Lisa K. Crone, Ph.D.

Research Economist

USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station

204 Siginaka Way, Sitka AK 99835

907-747-4311, [lkcrone@fs.fed.us](mailto:lkcrone@fs.fed.us)

Joe R. Mehrkens, MS

Economics Consultant

Environmental Economics Alaska

Juneau, AK 99835

907-789-3323, [jrmehrkens@yahoo.com](mailto:jrmehrkens@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

Because the Tongass National Forest accounts for roughly 80 percent of the land area in southeast Alaska, its resources have always been viewed as an important component of economic development in the region. This paper provides a brief overview of the major commercial uses of the natural resources found in or directly influenced by the Tongass. The primary time frame examined begins with the administrative establishment of the forest (1902-1908) and runs through 2008, with a cursory look to the future. The commercial uses discussed are timber and wood products, mining, fishing, tourism and hydro power. While each of these uses existed to some degree prior to the establishment of the Tongass, each has followed different patterns of expansion and contraction. Today the economy of the region as a whole is much less dependent on direct employment in natural resource industries than it was in the past, however in many locales this dependence remains. Factors both within and external to the region have changed the relative comparative advantages of each natural resource industry. Finding the balance of uses that enhances the region's current and future comparative advantages, addresses the economic needs of local communities and satisfies conservation goals for the Tongass will continue to be a challenge for all involved.