

Opening Statement  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Forest Management Oversight Hearing  
June 25, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I agree wholeheartedly with you on the importance of increasing the timber harvest on our federal lands. You have heard me describe the situation in Southeast Alaska before, but it bears repeating. 95 percent of the land base is federal. The Tongass National Forest is 80 percent of that federal land. At nearly 17 million acres, it is larger than West Virginia, Senator Manchin's home state. Southeast Alaska is now, and has historically been, a resource dependent economy directly tied to the federal land that dominates it.

Over the past 20 years, the forest industry, once the second largest industry in the state, has been in decline. Political and economic pressures, increased federal land withdrawals, a more stringent regulatory climate and environmental lawsuits forced the closure of Southeast Alaska's two pulp mills. The Tongass Land Use Management Plan movement toward ecosystem management, and the reinstatement of the Roadless Rule, have also sharply reduced allowable harvest levels leading to the closure of most of the sawmills. A single large sawmill in Wrangell and a handful of mom and pop operations are all that is left.

Mr. Chairman, you know what the Tongass is harvesting on average? Just 35 million board feet a year. This is unacceptable. What's left of the timber industry is hanging on by a thread and with it the jobs, schools and futures of many of my constituents.

I look forward to a rigorous discussion about the Federal policies and management practices on our federal lands that are affecting the timber harvest and how we might work together to remove the obstacles that exist to providing a sufficient timber supply long-term to sustain a vibrant forest industry well in to the future.

I also want to welcome, Mr. Chris Maisch, the State Forester from my home state. I look forward to his testimony and that of our other witnesses.