

S I T N E W S

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Governor Says Ruling in NRDC Timber Case a Victory

Judge's final decision could free up timber for struggling Southeast mills

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Juneau, Alaska - Governor Frank H. Murkowski today applauded U.S. District Court Judge James K. Singleton's dismissal of the Natural Resources Defense Council lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service. Singleton dismissed the plaintiff's complaint and denied its motion for a preliminary injunction that would have prevented the Forest Service from beginning road construction work for a timber sale. The decision releases approximately 200 million board feet of timber for sale to Southeast Alaska's sawmills - one being the Pacific Log & Lumber sawmill in Ketchikan.

"This ruling is a victory for the timber dependent communities and workers in Southeast Alaska," said the governor. "The Tongass Land Use Plan sets forth clear guidance on timber sales in the Tongass National Forest. It is unacceptable that outside special interest groups, bent on destroying the timber industry continue to file frivolous lawsuits such as this, wasting taxpayer money and hurting the hardworking people of the region."

The State of Alaska and the Alaska Forest Association had petitioned to intervene in the case on behalf of the Forest Service. Plaintiffs in the case were the Natural Resources Defense Council, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, and the Center for Biological Diversity. Only one of the plaintiffs houses its main office in Alaska.

"The state will continue to intervene in these unnecessary lawsuits," said Murkowski. "We do development right in Alaska. I will continue to stand up to these outside special interest groups who believe that we can't grow our economy and protect our environment. They are simply wrong."

The decision in the case is subject to appeal.

Section 338 of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2004 required that rulings in certain Tongass timber cases be decided within 180 days of their filing. The deadline for this particular case passed more than three months ago. Judge Singleton had issued a tentative decision on June 9, but a final decision did not come until September 24th. The governor on September 20th wrote a letter to the court urging the judge to issue a final ruling.