How protecting the tongass helps Alaska's economy

Last week, the Biden administration rolled back the previous administration's 11th-hour plan to strip protections from 9.6 million acres of the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska. The new approach is an effort to ensure the forest will remain preserved for the foreseeable future and invests $25 million in the local economy to offset the loss of logging revenue.

Listen to the rhetoric of Republican politicians in the state, and you might think the plan represents a death knell to southeast Alaska's economy. "It will cost jobs, diminish income, keep energy prices high, and cripple the ability of the communities in the region to develop a sustainable, year-round economy," reads a statement from Senator Lisa Murkowski.

"Let me be clear: $25 million doesn't even come close to covering the economic damage that this administration's policies will inflict on southeast Alaska," says Senator Dan Sullivan in a press release. "Alaskans have the right to make a living, support our families, and connect our communities and have a much greater interest in seeing the Tongass healthy and sustainably managed than outside extreme environmental groups pulling the strings in the Biden administration."

But logging the Tongass never made financial sense to the local, state, or national economy to begin with. It came at a massive cost to American taxpayers, was vastly unpopular, would have destroyed much larger, more profitable industries in the state, and would hurt our country's ability to slow the effects of climate change. Logging activity directly threatens the industries that actually drive southeast Alaska's economy: seafood and tourism.

At 16.7 million acres, the Tongass is America's largest national forest. The forested portion—those 9.6 million acres the GOP wanted to log—also represents the largest rainforest in our country, one that absorbs eight percent of our annual carbon emissions. It's also an area of extraordinary biodiversity, containing more plant life per square mile than any other place on this continent, and serving as home to the densest populations of brown bears and bald eagles in North America. It's a target for logging because it contains vast tracts of virgin, old growth trees that can reach 200 feet tall, and which are up to 800 years old. While that lumber is incredibly valuable, its remote location makes it extremely hard to access. And because a decades-old Forest Service policy dictates that logging operations on its lands must be profitable, the cost of accessing the Tongass' lumber is paid for not by logging companies, but by taxpayers. Existing logging operations in the forest have cost taxpayers $44 million a year since 1980. By that policy, every new mile of logging road cut into the Tongass as part of the Trump administration's plan to open it up, may have cost taxpayers somewhere around $500,000 per-mile.

Over 90 percent of lumber logged in the Tongass is shipped to China, where the cheap cost created by American taxpayer subsidization is used to fuel that country's booming construction industry, and to build furniture and other goods that are then exported to American consumers.

Even as Alaskan lumber helps Chinese businesses boom, communities in southeast Alaska don't see the same return. Logging provides less than one percent of the region's jobs, employing 372 people in 2019 and adding $22 million annually to the local economy. And logging activity directly threatens the industries that actually drive southeast Alaska's economy: seafood and tourism.

Erosion and runoff created by logging can flow into the streams and rivers that spawn salmon, smothering their eggs. Salmon fishing in the Tongass contributes $238 million annually to southeast Alaska's economy, and provides 3,743 jobs in the region. Tourists who come to see the Tongass' abundant wildlife and unspoiled natural places support 8,394 jobs and add $271 million in economic activity.

"1,000 year-old trees take 1,000-years to grow," Andrew Thoms, Executive Director of the Sitka Conservation Society, told the Juneau Empire. "If you log them all in 60 years, you run out."

Sealaska, an Alaska Native corporation owned by Indigenous shareholders, is transitioning out of old growth logging this year. To replace that income, the company is converting the 300,000 acres of forest it owns in the Tongass to carbon sequestration. In the first five years, the program has generated $100 million in profits; 2020 was the most profitable year ever.

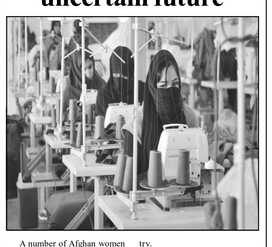
"We need healthy rivers and forests, abundant fish and wildlife, beautiful scenery, and management that recognizes the cultural values of the forest, not more costly and damaging clear-cut logging of old-growth forest," said Austin Williams, the Alaska director of policy and programs for Trout Unlimited, in an emailed statement.

In 2001, the Clinton administration acted to protect the Tongass with The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which prohibited new road building in sensitive areas, effectively limiting logging there to already existing levels. The policy announced last October by the Trump administration stripped Roadless protections from the Tongass. The Biden administration's new policy reinstates the rule's protections, and announces an effort to make those protections permanent. It's also providing a one-time $25 million investment in local communities, effectively offsetting any economic activity that may have been provided by expanded logging this year, while actually saving taxpayers money in subsidies that would have had to pay for new road construction.

The debate of Tongass logging represents a microcosm of the one around extraction industries, climate change, and jobs taking place at the national level right now. Going back to Senators Murkowski and Sullivan: Why are they supporting an industry that generates less than 1 percent of southeast Alaska's jobs and economic activity and not the region's primary employers and revenue generators?

The Western Values Project, a conservation advocacy organization, reports that there are longstanding financial ties between companies seeking to log the Tongass and republican officials in Alaska. Kirk Dahlstrom, the CEO of Viking Lumber donated to the campaigns of both senators, and the lawyer who represented his bid to log old growth lumber in the Tongass, Richard Goeken, served as principal deputy general counsel to the United States Department of Agriculture under Trump.

Concerns over losing Afghan women's achievements & their uncertain future



A number of Afghan women in their interviews with The Kabul Times correspondent by expressing concern over increasing insecurities and surge in Taliban attacks and their uncertain future said fear surrounded them of losing achievements they have gained in the past 20 years. They say they have been able to take effective steps towards developments in politics and economy in the past 20 years.

"Although Afghan women have experienced all restrictions and prohibitions imposed during the Taliban regime and better understand the recurrence of this situation, the generation born few years back after the Taliban regime in the last two decades has accustomed with an open democratic environment; therefore, they won't tolerate a closed space with the nature of dictatorship and misogynistic," said Zakia, an Afghan entrepreneur.

She said the new generation, having mostly MA and PhD with great aspirations and big hopes to contribute to the development and progress of the country, has been now disappointed as the Taliban has intensified their attacks across the country. But, there is still hope as the international community is committed to supporting the Afghan government particularly the Afghan women. If they don't support, all achievements the Afghan women have achieved in the past 20 years will be lost.

Nafisa, another Afghan women activist, says currently, a large number of Afghan women working as teachers, health workers and other fields for government and non-government institutions have lost their employment due to surge in Taliban attacks in districts and remote areas of the country.

"Taliban has imposed heavy limitations on Afghan women in all those districts and areas they have captured in the past two months. All women have been told to leave their employment and sit at home, showing clear cruelty of the group," Nafisa said.

It is said that a number of female teachers in Taliban undercontrol districts say they don't get out of their homes as Taliban fighters are walking around and have imposed limitations on women and girls. According to these women, they cannot go to school to teach in case schools get opened as Taliban are looking for any excuses to punish them.

Currently, all development and social activities have been suspended in areas and districts Taliban has recently captured. Taliban has imposed strict and heavy limitations on women in particular in all those areas and districts they have taken the full control in the past two months.

Taliban's behavior and treatment is all against the civil and democratic values, while a number of Islamic countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and other Islamic countries have turned to maintain reconciliation between modern and religious values through dialogue rather than confront them violently and forcibly.

All those Afghan women who have lost their employment amid surge in Taliban attacks and increasing insecurities in different parts of the country are asking the government to retake all those districts Taliban have taken the control in the past two months. They hope security is maintained in their areas so that they can go to work once again.

Shukria Kohistani

Does America face a slowdown in economic growth?

IT WAS INEVITABLE that global economic growth would slow from the breakneck pace set as economies recovered from the pandemic. Lately, investors have begun to worry about something worse: that America's economy, which has led the rich-world rebound, could decelerate sharply. As well as supply bottlenecks and the withdrawal of economic stimulus, the country, like many others, now faces the ultra-infectious Delta variant. A painful slowdown remains unlikely.

But the renewed spread of the virus is the biggest of those three dangers.

To see how the latest rich-world coronavirus waves are likely to develop, consider that on July 20th America reported a seven-day moving average of 112 new cases for every million people. That is roughly where Britain, with a higher rate of vaccination, more restrictions and deadlier past outbreaks, was in mid-June before Delta got going. Britain now has 699 cases per million, the fifth-highest rate in the world. If all else is equal, Delta spreads two or three times as quickly as the original strain of the virus.economist

A 'delta' chill in the air? The economy is still booming, but it faces new uncertainty

The U.S. economy caught fire in the spring and it's still running pretty hot this summer, but a new strain of the coronavirus is threatening to cast a chill over the recovery.

Worries about the so-called delta strain sent a shiver through investors last week after the number of people catching the virus quickly climbed from a pandemic low. The stock market DJIA, +0.68% posted its biggest decline in almost 10 months before recovering and bond yields also fell.

Although the U.S. Covid caseload is still quite low, the delta variant has introduced new uncertainty into the economic outlook and forced households, businesses and government to consider how to respond.

The reaction so far? Not much. Los Angeles County recommended that residents wear masks again, but it's one of the few governments to do so.

By and large, the delta variant has drawn a wait-and-see reaction. Just look at the stock market. The Dow Jones Industrial Average recovered all of its losses in just a few days and was back at an all-time high.

A chief reason for the optimism, it seems, is that the White House and Federal Reserve will do whatever it takes to keep the economy propped up.

"As long as the government and the Fed keep pumping things up, it is hard to see how the markets can stay down for an extended period," said chief economist Joel Naroff of Naroff Economic Advisors.

Massive government financial stimulus played a huge role in what's expected to be a very strong U.S. economic performance in the second quarter. Economists polled by The Wall Street Journal estimate that gross domestic product soared at a 9.1% annual rate in the period stretching from April to June.

That would be one of the strongest American growth rates ever and help compensate for the devastating economic losses early in the pandemic. GDP, the official scorecard for the U.S. economy, will be released on Thursday.

More important, of course, is what happens next. GDP is mostly a look in the rearview mirror.

Other reports next week are likely to show the U.S. sustaining its recent momentum. Consumer spending data and orders for manufactured goods in June are also expected to point to underlying strength in the economic recovery. Households are spending freely and businesses just can't keep up with demand. One of their biggest problems is finding enough workers.

What about the delta strain?

So far most people who are catching it are unvaccinated. So-called break-though cases among the vaccinated, meanwhile, are not inducing many severe reactions or deaths.

So it seems the prognosis for broader economy — not to mention the health of the public — is still pretty good with more than 68% of the adult U.S. population having received at least one shot.

Yet if there's one thing that's been learned during the pandemic, nothing can be taken for granted. The virus could mutate again, for instance, or individuals, businesses and government could adopt defensive measures that take some steam out of the recovery.

Perhaps the most realistic danger for now is that the delta variant will spread more rapidly around the world and further disrupt global supply chains that have been strained by the pandemic.

These supply-chain problems — a notable example is a shortage of computer chips — could exacerbate the surge in U.S. inflation this year and further raise costs for consumers and businesses alike.

Already higher inflation is hurting Americans financially and undermining confidence in the recovery. A key inflation report next week, known as the PCE price index, due on Friday, is expected to show another large increase.

The Fed, for its part, is likely to try to reassure consumers and investors next week that the spike in inflation is just temporary after its latest big meeting on the economy. That's been the Fed's mantra for months.

marketwatch

Virus resurgence menaces economy just as rescue programs unravel

The resurgence of the coronavirus is threatening to undercut the U.S. economic recovery and upend Americans' plans to return to work just as the sweeping social safety net that Congress built during the pandemic is unraveling.

That one-two punch — a new wave of cases followed by the looming expiration of enhanced jobless benefits, a ban on evictions and other rescue programs — is sparking concern among lawmakers and economists who say that while widespread business shutdowns are unlikely, renewed fears of the virus alone can slow the economy just as it's getting back on track.

That could dampen hiring and keep some workers on the sidelines of the job market — stalling or even reversing the labor recovery, the centerpiece of President Joe Biden's economic agenda. New unemployment claims jumped last week to 419,000, well above expectations and the highest since mid-May, the Labor Department reported on Thursday.

Biden — whose Gallup approval rating dropped to 50 percent this week, its lowest yet — is already drawing attacks from Republicans over the issue. Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the top GOP tax writer in Congress, said the president has focused too much on pushing his "$4 trillion spending binge" and not enough on the virus.

Jason Furman, a former top economic adviser to President Barack Obama who is close to the current White House economic team, said the West Wing is very aware of the risks to the economy from the spike in Covid cases.

"Any problem that has a 5 to 10 percent chance to derail the economic recovery you are looking at very closely and are worried about," Furman said.

He said that concern isn't especially high, however, because even under "the most plausible worst-case scenario," the risk is that the Delta variant "takes what was a very fast recovery and turns it into just a fast recovery."

Another person familiar with the economic team's discussions confirmed that the White House is paying close attention but doesn't consider the virus a significant threat. Biden has been calling on Americans to get vaccinated, mainly out of concern for people's safety but also with an eye out for the economy, the person said.

Biden, speaking on Monday after the stock market tumbled as investors braced for a potential rebound of the virus, said, "We can't let up, especially because of the Delta variant, which is more transmissible and more dangerous."

Coronavirus cases have been rising nationwide and are back to their highest level since early May as the highly contagious variant spreads across the country. The sharp uptick has reignited fears of the pandemic, particularly as cases rise among young children who are unable to get a vaccine and even among those who have been fully vaccinated.

"If people don't feel safe, they're going to close schools. If people don't feel safe, they're not going to go back to work," said Claudia Sahm, a former Federal Reserve economist. "The recovery — it's going, but it's still vulnerable."

While it's far too early to gauge the fallout from the increase in cases, any Delta-driven jobs slowdown is likely to be most pronounced in blue states, where higher percentages of residents are vaccinated but where people are also less willing to take risks as coronavirus cases rise. A CBS News poll this week showed that nearly 3 in 4 fully vaccinated Americans are worried about the Delta variant, compared to less than half of those who are not fully vaccinated or who have not received any shots at all.

Those same Democratic-led states also have the most jobs left to recover since they had stricter shutdown orders in place initially and then reopened more slowly. Roughly 8 million of the 10 million jobs that are still missing in the economy from before the pandemic are in blue states, said Arindrajit Dube, a labor economist at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The slowdown in jobs growth, then, is likely to be most acute in the states where the need is greatest. And given how much economic activity those states generate, the ripple effects on the macroeconomy will be more severe.

"If you have highly populous parts of the country who have taken Covid seriously the entire time, and those people get afraid, then you have at least a noticeable slowing in the recovery," said Sahm, now a senior fellow at the Jain Family Institute.

If Delta continues to spread, the economic shock would come as huge swaths of Americans are still struggling to get back on their feet. While wages have been rising, particularly for low-income workers in leisure and hospitality, those gains have been outpaced by inflation. politico