



Change at the U.S. Forest Service



By Danny Dructor-American Loggers Council

On August 18 the Trump Administration made the surprise announcement that Tom Tidwell, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service was retiring after 40 years at the agency. There has been much speculation on who would run the Forest Service after the President's inauguration and the confirmation of former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue as Secretary of Agriculture.

The timing of the announcement is notable. Tidwell left the agency during the peak wildfire fire season when the agency is scrambling to allocate resources and money to suppress fires. And the administration has yet to nominate a USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, which oversees the Forest Service and is responsible for implementing the administration's policy priorities.

There are still many unanswered questions about the direction of the Forest Service under President Trump. But the question of who will lead the agency was answered quickly. Just two days after Tidwell's retirement announcement, Secretary Purdue named Tony Tooke as the new Chief. Tooke is a native Alabaman and a life-long Forest Service employee, most recently serving as the Regional Forester for Region 8 in the Southeastern United States.

In making the announcement Secretary Perdue said Tooke "will oversee efforts to get our forests working again, to make them more productive, and to create more jobs. His focus will be on ensuring we are good neighbors and are managing our forests effectively, efficiently, and responsibly, as well as working with states and local governments to ensure the utmost collaboration."

Tooke has extensive experience working at the highest levels of the Forest Service at the Washington Office, having also served as Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System (NFS). He took a lead role in the implementation of a new planning rule for the NFS, and he is well-versed on our complex system of federal land management. Tooke understands how the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act and other rules and regulations affect the development and economics of projects for loggers purchasing federal timber.

It is clear that Tooke is being directed to increase timber harvests on national forests, which is especially critical to loggers in areas dominated by federal land ownership. We hope he is successful, but the American Loggers Council will continue to lobby Congress, and work with the Federal Forest Resource Coalition to ensure the Forest Service receives adequate funding and personnel to increase the pace and scale of management activities.

We will continue to advocate for reforms such as those in the Resilient Federal Forests Act that seeks to expedite projects on forests that are immediately at-risk of catastrophic wildfire, insects and disease, while reducing obstructive litigation that typically stymies the work that needs to be done. We will continue to promote the development of biomass to create more markets for wood products, and pursue opportunities in the Forestry Title of the 2018 Farm Bill that Congress must pass before it is finished.

ALC will also seek to educate Chief Tooke on the many challenges our industry is facing, especially for independent contract loggers. Most of all, we will encourage Chief Tooke to take risks, try new ways of doing business, and defy the special interests in Washington DC who have spent decades undermining the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate to manage our forests for the "greatest good."

Now that a new Forest Service Chief is in place, we urge President Trump and Secretary Perdue to install a new Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment. Leadership at this position is essential if the administration wants to achieve its goals of supporting forestry on public and private lands, and protecting the future of our industry.

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