

## **Yellow-cedar 90-day Finding Questions & Answers**

### **1. What is the Service announcing?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces a 90-day finding on a petition to list yellow-cedar as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Based on its review, the Service finds that the petition, dated June 24, 2014, presents substantial information indicating that listing this species may be warranted. The Service is also opening a 60-day comment period to collect the best available scientific and commercial information which will assist in a future status review.

### **2. What are the most significant potential threats to yellow-cedar?**

The primary threat described in the petition (and in references cited in the petition) is widespread mortality of yellow-cedar trees resulting from freezing of shallow roots after the trees have broken winter dormancy in the spring. This is currently understood to be caused by lack of snow cover during late winter, triggering early de-hardening of the trees and their root systems, followed by hard freezes when there is no insulating layer of snow. This threat is believed to be a result of climate change, with warmer late-winter conditions occurring now than when individual yellow-cedar stands were initiated. According to the petition, due to its slow regeneration rate and narrow habitat niche, yellow-cedar may not be capable of colonizing alternative sites that may provide adequate habitat in the future fast enough to offset current mortality.

The petition also asserts that healthy yellow-cedar stands are disproportionately targeted for harvest because of the tree's high economic value. Clearcut logging may expose a site to wider temperature variations than previously occurred under forested conditions, potentially increasing mortality for regenerating yellow cedar.

### **3. Where can yellow cedar be found?**

Yellow-cedar is primarily a coastal species that occurs from the Siskiyou Mountains of northern California to Prince William Sound, Alaska, with isolated interior stands in Southeastern British Columbia and central Oregon.

### **4. What ongoing research and conservation is being done relative to yellow-cedar?**

The U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) has been studying yellow-cedar decline in Southeast Alaska for many years. Researchers from the Pacific Northwest Research Station's Forest

Sciences Laboratory have developed many of the hypotheses concerning the possible causes of the decline. The Forest Service in Alaska is also developing a conservation plan for the species.

#### **5. What are the next steps/timeline?**

The Service is currently directing available staff and resources towards implementing the court-approved Multi-District Litigation settlement agreements and completing a number of additional court-ordered actions. The timing and schedule of the yellow-cedar status review will be developed in the context of this Service-wide strategy. Based on the results of the status review, the Service will issue a 12-month finding on the petition, which will address whether listing the species as threatened or endangered is warranted, as provided in section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Endangered Species Act. If, after the status review, we determine that listing the yellow-cedar is warranted, we will propose critical habitat (see definition in section 3(5)(A) of the Act) under section 4 of the Act, to the maximum extent prudent and determinable at the time we propose to list the species.