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Tongass National Forest 2017 Annual Report

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

"A team of passionate professionals working together to manage the functioning ecosystems and abundant resources of the Tongass in a way that meets our responsibility to the land and duty to the public."

From the Forest Supervisor

What you see above is the Vision Statement of the Tongass National Forest, which we use to guide our decisions and operations throughout the year. The key phrase from this statement is our "responsibility to the land and duty to the public." Every day, this Forest's roughly 400 employees strive to uphold that statement through the principles of Shared Stewardship, Accountability to the American Taxpayer, and Commitment to Communities. You will see these principles in action as you continue through this report, but I'd like to expand on these principles a little before you do.

Shared Stewardship

We believe our approach to stewardship should be integrated and collaborative, with community involvement from development to evaluation. The results of our efforts should produce ecological, social and economic benefit to our diverse constituencies across all land ownerships. This can only be done by building and sustaining partnerships, using all available authorities and instruments. We strive to maximize public and private investments in our forest.

Examples of this approach include the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis, developed using a highly collaborative method with the public, and receiving its project proposals from an independently formed, broadly based collaborative group called the POW Landscape Assessment Team. The Hoonah Native Forest Partnership is another great example, recently partnering some of our hydrologists with the local landowners to improve their ability to manage the land, generate subsistence resources, and fulfill landowner management objectives.

Accountability to the American Taxpayer

Our communities, and all American taxpayers, rightfully demand that we conduct their business efficiently, effectively, and with the utmost integrity. To do so, our actions must balance our responsibility to protecting resources with the expectations of our recreational users through prioritization of efforts, sound investments, collaboration, and community engagement. The demands for use on our forest and the operating budgets we have to meet them are ever changing, and we must adjust as they do in order to continue meeting our responsibilities.

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Exchange is a solid example of balancing our responsibilities to the land and the people, providing approximately 21,000 federal acres of timber lands to support an

important community organization and receiving 18,000 non-federal acres to be managed for multiple-use, including resource conservation and sustainable recreation. The exchange aligns land ownership patterns with the inherent missions of both the Forest Service and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, to the benefit of all.

Commitment to Communities

From the harvest of wild Alaska seafood to the sustainable harvest of timber and forest products, and the celebration of cultural ties, the forest supports the Southeast Alaskan way of life culturally and economically. We recognize the importance of our forest to the vitality of adjacent communities and strive to remain engaged and impactful in any way we can. This means different things to different communities, and we take pride in being ready and willing to step forward as needed.

In Angoon and Kake, we helped introduce high school aged youth to the field of natural resources, providing training and workforce development through the Youth Conservation Corps Program. And in Sitka, our soil scientists and hydrologists worked as part of the Sitka Geohazards Task Force to advance understanding of landslides for community safety.

Thank you for taking the time to see what is happening on your forest, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the report. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to all Tongass employees, our outstanding partners, and you (the public) for making it possible to accomplish all of this in 2017. I look forward to working with you in 2018 to accomplish even more, and to make sure our amazing temperate rainforest continues to provide the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run. After all, we're in this together.

Sincerely,
M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest

Tongass National Forest Quick Facts

- Approximately 17 million acres
- Largest, intact temperate rain forest in the world.
- Larger than 10 U.S. states (individually, not combined), including West Virginia, Maryland, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Vermont.
- Visits bring more than \$380 million per year to SE Alaska
- Supports more than 5,000 local jobs
- There are no threatened or endangered species on the forest
- There are more brown bears on one island (Admiralty) within the Tongass than there are in the entire Lower 48 states combined

Admiralty Island National Monument

Youth Conservation Corps Empowers Native Youth in Southeast Alaska

Six high school students built brighter futures for themselves and their rural Angoon community in 2017. The Youth Conservation Program (YCC) provided them with trail and infrastructure maintenance, wilderness monitoring, camping, and kayaking knowledge. The skills prepared them for futures in environmental stewardship in Southeast Alaska.

The crew monitored wilderness solitude, cleaned approximately 50 miles of shoreline, delivered building materials, brushed trails and recreation sites, dug trenches for latrines, and removed hundreds of pounds of trash. Crew leaders also contacted local organizations needing assistance with outdoor community projects, introducing the youth to community engagement.

"I am proud of the spirit these young adults have displayed in stepping forward and taking ownership of stewarding their community and the surrounding National Forest System lands," said Wilderness Manager Kevin Hood. "They are inspiring other youth to follow their lead, strengthen their community, and gain valuable experience toward natural resource careers."

The crew's growth in professionalism and job skills were immediately apparent.

Community members and teachers noted the positive transformation in the youths' morale, school performance, and attendance.

Thanks to the partnership and support of Chatham School District, National Forest Foundation, Hecla Greens Creek Mine, Walmart, Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), and Student Conservation Association, the YCC program continues to positively influence the futures of young adults and rural communities in Southeast Alaska.

Admiralty Island National Monument and Hoonah District Ranger Chad VanOrmer received the Tongass Collaborative Stewardship Group award in 2017, in part due to the success with the Angoon crew.

Side quote: Partnerships continue to positively influence the futures of young adults and rural communities in Southeast Alaska.

Juneau Ranger District

Disappearing Mendenhall Glacier Motivates Change

Mendenhall Glacier is Alaska's biggest attraction and contains the busiest Forest Service Visitor Center in America. Approximately 600,000 people visit the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area each year for hikes or paddles to stunning views, spawning salmon, fishing black bears, ice caves and more. Recent studies have shown, however, that the glacier will disappear from view in 33 years. How will we adapt, especially when over 70% of Juneau visitors want to see ice?

Discussions began in August 2016 about the future of Mendenhall Glacier recreation facilities, and the Forest Service engaged Corvus Design Inc. to help plan for the future. Public input over the past year has revealed some fascinating trends. For example, in 33 years the visitation to Juneau is predicted to top two million. The Forest Service wants to accommodate all that want to visit, which means "chasing the ice", and perhaps even constructing a new visitor center further up the valley with more direct access to

the glacier. This new center might be accessed by a road, or it may only be accessible by boat and cable car. Multiple options will be examined as part of the Conceptual Design Process now underway.

If a new visitor center is constructed, what will happen to the existing visitor center? Nearby Steep Creek attracts sockeye and silver salmon that could be restored through habitat improvements, and bear viewing could be enhanced with improved platforms. Residents and visitors both love to see wildlife in the recreation area, as much as they love seeing the glacier.

Our disappearing glacier presents compelling opportunities for interpreting ecological and social change. We are committed to sustainability and are improving our systems and facilities to lower demands for energy and power. Recently the visitor center replaced lighting and ventilation systems that saved over 25% on electricity. We will also consider generating hydro-power within the recreation area to power our systems and to provide a link between our past and future. 100 years ago this was the site of a powerhouse that generated almost 3Mw of electricity! We also hope to power electric buses and trams to move people, and improve the air quality and congestion at key points.

Side quote: Approximately 600,000 people visit the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area each year for hikes or paddles to stunning views, spawning salmon, fishing black bears, ice caves and more.

Craig/Thorne Bay Ranger District

POWLLA, JOINT CHIEFS, TIMBER, and RESTORATION

POWLLA

The Craig/Thorne Bay Ranger District encompass Prince of Wales Island (POW) and surrounding islands, which is the project area for the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POWLLA). This project analyzes multiple projects at a landscape level to implement over the course of 10 to 15 years. The proposed action was developed using a highly collaborative method involving the public through the National Environmental Policy Act process. An independently formed, broadly based collaborative group called the POW Landscape Assessment Team, met monthly over the past year to develop a set of projects for the Forest to consider in the POWLLA Project. The staff spent much of the field season in 2017 collecting data on these projects and preparing alternatives for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

JOINT CHIEFS

The Craig/Thorne Bay Ranger District was the recipient of a Joint Chiefs project along with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, titled the Prince of Wales Landscape Restoration Project. This project involved, Sealaska, Haida Corporation, The Hydaburg Cooperative Association (HCA), The City of Hydaburg, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Craig Tribal Association. The project emphasis for 2017 was assessing improvements to Hydaburg's municipal water source, fish and wildlife data collection, in-stream restoration, timber stand improvements, and fish and wildlife habitat restoration. District staff also worked with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Hydaburg Cooperative Association, and The Nature Conservancy on a wolf abundance project, placing hairboards around the island to collect hair samples to estimate wolf populations.

RECREATION/HERITAGE

The Sunnahae Trail Phase III and Control Lake dock Federal Land Access Program projects were initiated in 2017. Sunnahae is a highly used trail next to the community of Craig. Control Lake dock is the access point for Control Lake Cabin, which is a popular cabin between Klawock and Thorne Bay. Recreation staff completed improvements to Polk Camp, the highest used cabin on POW. Polk Camp was formerly an administrative site that was converted to a rental cabin with the help of local volunteers. Heritage staff on POW also completed a human remains repatriation process with the Klawock Cooperative Tribe.

RESTORATION

In 2017, restoration activities were conducted in the Stoney Creek watershed under agreement between TNC and the Forest Service. Under a contract between TNC and Rimco Construction, upland restoration was completed as directed by Forest Service personnel. The primary work restored 0.5 miles of stream on the main channel of Scout Creek through the placement of over 200 pieces of wood and rock found around the project area. Following the instream restoration, road improvement work was completed at water crossings with fish passage concerns and water crossing with hydrological concerns. All work was completed using heavy equipment and general labor.

TIMBER

District staff continued to administer the Big Thorne Integrated Resource Timber Contract in 2017 and associated stewardship items. The Kosciusko Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Young Growth Timber Sale was awarded under GNA by the State of Alaska. Other small sales were administered and offered on POW in 2017 as well. In 2017, 1855 acres of pre-commercial and wildlife thinning was accomplished. The island also hosted a Young Growth Academy to train applicants in forestry related practices. Some of the applicants went to work for the State of Alaska conducting young growth inventory for the Forest.

Hoonah Ranger District

HOONAH NATIVE FOREST PARTNERSHIP - STREAM RESTORATION WORKSHOP

The Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (HNFP) is in its third year of work. Over the past two field seasons, local crews have spent countless hours learning-and-doing natural resource assessment, with the resulting data being used to generate an extensive list of projects to manage the land, generate subsistence resources, and fulfill landowner management objectives. To prepare for some of the future implementation work, U.S. Forest Service Hydrologists Katherine Prussian, Marty Becker, and Heath Whitacre, arranged a three day stream restoration workshop to simultaneously train the HNFP local workforce and improve stream function of a local salmon stream.

The collaborative effort demonstrated hand tool restoration methods on Spasski Creek, part of Huna Totem Corporation land near Hoonah, Alaska. The objectives of the hands-on workshop were to review how to select restoration sites, source restoration logs, and complete a stream restoration using hand-tools. The restoration project used manual labor that was less impactful on the environment, relative to heavy equipment. A key lesson of the workshop was learning to place structures that enhance existing pools and features.

Prior to the project, the restoration site had only one pool in a half-mile stretch of river. Logging removed trees in the riparian corridor and it lacked wood in-stream to slow down water, hold bed-load,

and create fish spawning/rearing habitat. Eight structures were installed, having an immediate, positive effect for the channel and for fish until trees grow large enough to fall into the creek again.

Stream restorations like this project can increase salmon return by creating better habitat for spawning and rearing salmon. Promoting salmon production is a key aspect of the HNFP as they are a highly important community resource and can be actively managed for by each of the three landowners. It was an invaluable opportunity for diverse landowners to share experiences and demonstrate skillsets in land management and forest stewardship. Open discussion prior to, during, and after the work provided opportunities to share local and traditional knowledge in combination with training. Future projects will seek to improve stream conditions for salmon by incorporating the innovative techniques learned during this workshop and may be expanded to larger projects using machinery.

Side quote: *“This opportunity is a great example of an all-lands perspective where multiple ownerships are working together for a common goal to restore the landscape.”*

Katherine Prussian, U.S. Forest Service

Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District

In 2017, the Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District (KMRD) emphasized working with partnerships to leverage project materials, meet staffing needs, and expand operating capacity. In cooperation with the Ketchikan Resource Advisory Committee (RAC), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), AmeriCorps, HistoriCorps, and the Boy Scouts of America, KMRD leveraged nearly \$240,000 in partner funds and thousands of volunteer and service hours. Specific project accomplishments include:

Ward Lake Recreation Area

KMRD completed the first part of a multi-year, focused effort to improve the Ward Lake Recreation Area. The Ketchikan RAC funded several new projects that included the purchase of locally sourced lumber for the construction of more than 40 picnic tables, and purchase of 20 fire rings and 10 replacement grills for campsites. District staff and SCA assembled and installed more than half of the new picnic tables. Grills for the day use area were installed in cooperation with a team of Boy Scouts led by Eagle Scout candidate Preston McLaren of Boy Scout Troop #22. Forest Service employees, SCA, AmeriCorps, and numerous volunteers worked through the field season to brush out and repair the Ward Lake, Ward Creek, and Perseverance Trails.

Manzanita Bay Recreation Shelter Restoration

KMRD and HistoriCorps completed a two-year project to restore the Manzanita Bay Recreation Shelter in the Misty Fjords National Monument Wilderness. Fallen trees were cut away and the foundation was stabilized using crosscut saws and traditional tools in keeping with Wilderness character. The shelter was rebuilt to its original design in the same location, reusing as much of the original materials as possible.

Ketchikan Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)

KMRD began facilitating a collaborative partnership that invites participation from all landowners in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough. The CWMA project is a multi-year project designed to manage invasive

weeds. Two SCAs were hired and trained to survey areas for invasive plants and coordinate community groups by physically removing and disposing of plants. About 50 miles of the Tongass Highway, trailheads, and areas where invasive species are known to spread were surveyed with about 1.5 tons of material removed during the field season.

Ketchikan Area Trail Maintenance Project

A four person, RAC funded crew performed maintenance on more than 30 miles of local trails connected to the Ketchikan road system while working alongside volunteers from other workgroups to maximize the workforce.

Hyder, Titan Trail and Bear Viewing Platform Rehabilitation

An AmeriCorps crew was dispatched to Hyder to perform maintenance on the Fish Creek bear viewing platform and to brush out the nearby Titan Trail. The crew repaired most of the handrails and several sections of the 600-foot long platform, and brushed out and repaired two difficult miles of the Titan Tail.

Petersburg Ranger District

Youth Employment, Fish Infrastructure & a Top Ten Glacier

Youth Training and Employment

The District entered in to a Participation Agreement with the Organized Village of Kake (OVK) to help develop and manage a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program, in order to introduce high school aged youth to the field of natural resources. This program, along with the Training Rural Alaskan Youth Leaders and Students (TRAYLS) pilot program, provided participants with valuable experience in managing natural resources and project areas. Program participants were introduced to projects exploring fisheries, hydrology, forest management, botany, archeology, and invasive species work. The training and employment programs included work in stream inventory and restoration, archeology monitoring, wildlife surveys, fisheries monitoring and maintenance, and enhancement of recreation sites and trails.

District resource specialists have also been working with OVK, Kake Tribal, and the City of Kake on developing a biomass facility to provide heat to the village. Along this same theme is continued work on Kake's Community Forest project, proposing an all-lands and all-hands approach to managing their natural resources.

Fish Pass Reconstruction

Preliminary work was completed and supplies ordered in preparation for reconstructing the Mitchell Creek fish-pass in the summer of 2018. The current fish-pass has met its anticipated lifespan and is in need of repair. This structure was constructed in 1992 with the express purpose of increasing sport fishing opportunities in the Petersburg area. The structure was implemented to allow access to 22.7 miles of stream habitat and 3.4 lake acres of salmonid spawning and rearing habitat.

Baird Glacier is Top Ten

The Baird Glacier was one of the top 10 Nature View Sites for 2017. It is one of the southern-most glaciers in North America that reaches sea-level. The Baird Glacier won this honor, in part, because it is a fascinating location to witness plant succession, interesting bird life, and marine and terrestrial mammals of Southeast Alaska. The glacier has an outwash plain and terminal moraine still accessible by boat, and serves as the summer nesting and/or feeding grounds to many seabirds, including the Arctic tern.

The moraine and the outwash plain are also home to hundreds of plant, lichen, moss and fungi species growing in colorful patterns and various successional stages. This delicate community of organisms can be safely viewed if visitors stay on the sandy trails. This hardy plant and fungal community is paving the way for a future temperate rainforest forest to grow. Within a few decades, these hardy pioneer species are naturally replaced by fast-growing alder and spruce seedlings. These seedlings will eventually grow into more of the beautiful, tall trees that comprise the Tongass National Forest.

Sitka Ranger District

Geohazards Task Force tackles landslides

Tongass National Forest soil scientists and hydrologists participated in a three-day meeting with agencies and the Sitka community to determine steps needed to produce a landslide warning system. Forest Service specialists led a field trip to sites of recent landslides and to portions of the community constructed at the foot of landslide prone slopes. They provided numerous presentations and at least one briefing paper about landslides to the Sitka community, which was hungry to learn more about landslide causes and potential effects.

The Sitka Geohazards Task Force was formed following the landslides on August 18, 2015, that claimed the lives of three people and caused considerable property damage along the community road system. It is a collaborative effort between several entities to advance the understanding of landslides in Sitka. The Geohazards Task Force was organized by the Sitka Sound Science Center and involves specialists from the Tongass National Forest, National Weather Service, National Park Service, State of Alaska Department of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, University of Alaska Southeast and Fairbanks, Pacific Northwest Experiment Station, Sitka Conservation Society, and City of Sitka. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration Jet Propulsion Lab used new techniques to map the hillside and continue to provide new maps to assess slope movement. The United States Geological Survey is also providing expertise regarding the development of a landslide warning system for the community. Shannon and Wilson are the City's contractor for slope stability assessments.

Over 60 landslides were caused by the August 2015 rainfall event. Forest Service hydrologists and soil scientists from the Sitka Ranger District were on scene assisting the community with information regarding causes of landslides, landslide safety, and aiding in the recovery effort. Forest Service staff took on-site measurements on initiation zones of 25 of those landslides. The subsequent report found that rainfall intensity appears to play a larger role in the ash soils around Sitka than in glacially derived soils of mixed mineralogy common throughout southeast Alaska. The field trip report was provided to the Geohazards Task Force.

Forest Service specialists will continue to be involved in the Sitka Geohazards Task Force, providing technical expertise and field support.

Wrangell Ranger District

Anan Wildlife Observatory Improved

Access and safety improvements to Anan's Wildlife Observatory trailhead, outhouses, lagoon overlook, and deck took place in 2017. It is easier for visitors to unload from boats and access the one-mile old growth forest trail along Anan Creek to the wildlife observation deck. Scribed steps at the trailhead climb from the ocean to a gravel area where groups may gather, meet the guides, and prepare for the hike to see the bears. The improvements at the observation deck addressed specific maintenance and safety concerns, and moved the outhouse to a more accessible location.

Improvement funding for a contract with Rainforest Contracting Inc. came from capital improvement dollars along with recreation enhancement program funds. The fees charged to outfitters and guides who bring visitors to Anan went directly back to the maintenance and improvement of this facility.

The improvements mark the completion of Phase One of the Anan Master Plan and were in response to concerns voiced by the public. Multiple partners in the Wrangell community were integral in the process, including the Stikine Jetboaters Association, Wrangell Cooperative Association Tribal Government and the Borough of Wrangell.

The Anan staff spend the summer living at Anan, observing and recording information about both bears and people. Information gathered at Anan helps guide planning and implementation of large-scale construction projects such as the trailhead improvements. It also aids in understanding wildlife behavior, human and wildlife interactions, and how to manage people and facility design in order to address these interactions safely for the thousands of visitors brought in by 16 boat and fixed-wing outfitter guides.

Feedback from visitors, outfitters and guides has been positive regarding the Anan improvements, and these stakeholders will continue to work with the Forest Service to enhance Anan into the future.

Yakutat Ranger District

Proud Partner of the Yakutat Tern Festival

The spectacular mountain ranges and the Gulf of Alaska squeeze the Yakutat forelands into a narrow corridor for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. Yakutat boasts more than 200 species of birds recorded to date, as well as the southernmost known and one of the largest breeding colonies of Aleutian terns.

The Yakutat Ranger District is a partner in the annual Yakutat Tern Festival, which takes place in June. Initiated in 2011, the mission of the festival is "to highlight the extraordinary natural and cultural resources of

Yakutat,” and to stimulate the local economy by hosting a festival celebrating Aleutian terns. Education of the local community, particularly youth, and stimulating ecotourism (“bird watching”) in the Yakutat area are two key objectives of the event.

A variety of bird-focused activities, as well as other natural and cultural resources are offered during the festival. From field trips and art exhibits to cultural programs focused around the Alaska Native Peoples, the festival appeals to a broad audience, especially youth. Children and teenagers are kept busy with art programs, field trips, native dance and language, mist-netting and bird banding, interactive bird-themed educational programs, and live bird presentations. Approximately 50 youth and over 100 adults participate annually in the 4-day event.

While still relatively small and community based, marketing efforts are drawing independent birders to the festival and spurring visits at other times of year. While the community works on spreading the word, the Yakutat Ranger District continues its vital role in preserving the future of the festival. Collaborative research, monitoring, and habitat stewardship of the festival’s prime attraction, Aleutian terns, is continuous alongside partners through the Alaskan breeding range.

*The festival planning committee includes representatives from the Yakutat Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, National Park Service, Yakutat City and Borough, and Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, in addition to volunteer committee members.

Out quote: *Highlighting the extraordinary natural and cultural resources of Yakutat*

Tribal Relations

The Tongass National Forest and Alaska Native Tribes in Southeast

The Tongass National Forest and Alaska Native Tribes in Southeast Alaska are stewards of the land. The Tribal Relations Program is dedicated to strengthening relationships between the Forest Service and federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and other Native organizations in order to increase collaboration. This past year, we have seen numerous examples of how these relationships have grown closer and stronger in the endeavor to preserve our land for generations to come.

The 200-seat theater in Ketchikan’s Southeast Alaska Discovery Center was dedicated to Elizabeth Peratrovich, noted Alaska Native civil rights Leader in February. The dedication was successful in large part due to the direct participation from the Peratrovich family and special key note presentation by Diane Benson, who reenacted Elizabeth’s historical testimony before the Alaska Territorial Legislature. The Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood (ANB/ANS) Grand Camp helped procure historical items relevant to Peratrovich and ANB/ANS, which are now displayed in a permanent exhibit.

Another major event was the re-installment of the Yaxté Totem Pole to its original location in the Auke Recreation Area, part of the Áak’w Kwáan traditional territory. The Forest Service hosted the raising ceremony with direct coordination and involvement of the Áak’w Kwáan, as well as the descendants of original carver. Tongass Tribal Relations received overwhelming support from numerous State, local, and Native organizations in the coordination of the totem raising ceremony.

Recognizing that over a half a million visitors come to Southeast Alaska each year, Tongass Tribal Relations seized an important educational opportunity to provide accurate and culturally relevant information to visitors and Forest Service employees. This was accomplished by providing an Orientation to Southeast Native Culture to the Visitor Center rangers and natural interpreter staff. The orientation included the tribal and clan history of the local area and a brief introduction to the Tlingit language. Next came the revision of the Tongass National Forest “Junior Ranger book”, a children’s activity book provided to school-aged children visiting the Forest. Traditional Tlingit form-line art work provided by local Native youth, as well as an ancient story provided by a Tlingit elder. Various Tlingit names, words and phrases were incorporated throughout the entire book. With help from Sealaska Heritage Institute, Tribal Relations was able to establish a new Native language Implementation into Forest Service Alaska Region websites and social media.

Following these great events, we look forward to further strengthening ties between the Forest Service and the Southeast Alaska Native community in 2018.

Mental Health trust Land Exchange

In May 5, 2017, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, Public Law 115-31, (“The Alaska Mental Health Trust Act of 2017” or “the Act”) was enacted and authorized for an equal value land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) and the Forest Service, Tongass National Forest. The land exchange is comprised of approximately 18,000 non-federal acres and 21,000 Federal acres across nine areas in Southeast Alaska.

The purpose of the exchange is to better align land ownership patterns with the inherent missions of both the USDA Forest Service and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. The AMHTA is gaining timber lands it can harvest to support its mission to ensure that Alaska has a comprehensive integrated mental health program for its citizens. The Tongass NF is gaining lands to be managed for multiple-use, including wilderness preservation and sustainable recreation.

Each phase of the exchange requires boundary-line survey, title reports, appraisal and completion of pre-exchange clearance, reviews relating to threatened and endangered species, cultural and historical resources, wetland/floodplains, and hazardous materials.

The Bureau of Land Management, Alaska State Office, issued survey instructions for Phase I of the land exchange, and began boundary line surveys of Federal Lands in 2017, with anticipated completion in the summer of 2018. The Forest Service issued the final appraisal instructions, awarded a contract appraiser, held pre-work meetings with the AMHT, and began initial site visits. In addition to the appraisal and survey process, the Tongass National Forest is beginning the work and site inspections for numerous required reports on minerals, hazardous materials, heritage and more.

Because the AMHT Act of 2017 also restricts Land Use Designations for all lands acquired by the Forest Service through the exchange to those that preserve—the undeveloped natural character of the non-Federal land, an extensive public involvement process will begin in 2018. When the Tongass NF acquires new lands, it is required to assign them a Land Use Designation (LUD). As the title suggests, this determines how the land can be used and managed. Generally, land acquired into Federal ownership is given the land use designation of adjacent lands. However, ten of the parcels acquired into Federal

ownership are not adjacent to a natural character LUD and cannot become the designation of the adjacent lands as an administrative change.

The public involvement process prior to LUD designation will ensure the Forest hears from, and accounts for, the diverse groups of stakeholders that are affected by this land exchange.

Out quote: Phase I - will be complete in May 2018 and includes approximately 2,400 Federal acres near Naukati, Alaska, in exchange for approximately 2,500 acres at Ketchikan, Alaska.

Phase II - scheduled for May 2019, would include the remaining approximate 18,600 Federal Acres and 15,500 Non-Federal Acres. Alaska's unique, complex public land laws, coupled with the scale of this land exchange, create a lengthy and complicated exchange process.

YOUNG GROWTH INVENTORY

The Tongass young-growth inventory is part of the forest's transition plan, in response to the Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas Vilsack's, 2013 memorandum instructing the Tongass "to speed the transition away from old-growth timber harvesting and towards a forest industry that utilizes second growth – or young growth – forests. The Secretary also emphasized that the transition must take place, in a way that preserves a viable timber industry that provides jobs and opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska.

The Alaska Division of Forestry and the Forest Service used recommendations made by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) compliant Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC), to work collaboratively with local communities, industry representatives and other partners throughout the scope of work identified. The work is being accomplished in collaboration with the Tongass Timber Collaborative, the State of Alaska, Sealaska and its subsidiaries, the Alaska Forest Association, non-profit economic development groups, communities, and rural schools.

Since work on the inventory began in 2016, crews have completed inventory of more than 9,000 plots and approximately 25,000 acres on Prince of Wales and Revilla Islands. In 2018, the crews will collect inventory data on 2,800 plots in Kake, Hoonah and Wrangell. The data from completed inventories include species composition, volume per acre, vegetation composition, stand observations, stream crossing points, presence of disease, wind throw and more.

The information will be used by decision makers and stakeholders to support transparent, informed decision making by forest managers and stakeholders as they seek to develop projects to meet transition objectives.

Along with the changing needs of the timber industry in their transition to harvest of young growth, there also exists workforce generational gap and skills gap in the way trees are harvested and processed. Federal and state agencies along with Native corporations and non-profits are partnering to ensure the current workforce is ready with the skills and expertise needed to handle future timber harvests.

The Haa Aaní Community Development Fund, Inc. and the Sustainable Southeast Partnership worked with the Forest Service and the Alaska Division of Forestry to provide free forestry academy training in

2016. The academy hosted Southeast Alaska residents who were interested in developing forestry skills and putting those skills to work as part of a seasonal crew conducting an inventory for future timber, fish, and wildlife management.

The second academy was held in 2017 in Thorne Bay. The training covered basic forestry skills and best practices, Forest Service safety requirements, and Alaska Division of Forestry inventory protocol. The academy had 28 individuals apply for the two week class, and 22 were invited to interview for 12 openings. The final cohort of students was 13, all of whom were qualified for forestry tech positions after passing the training.

At the current rate, within five years there will be 40 trained residents added to the workforce – a large increase in today's small industry.

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For more information, visit us online at www.fs.usda.gov/tongass/

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