



## Project Update – April 2018

# Central Tongass Project

The Central Tongass<sup>1</sup> planning team thanks you for taking the time to share Tongass-related activities important to you, and for attending last month’s public meetings. With the goal of keeping the conversation going, we are providing this summary of the activities we heard you want implemented on your National Forest lands across the Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts. We also answer some of the questions we’ve heard about the project since public outreach began in January.

## Where we’ve been and what we’ve heard

To identify activities important to you in the Central Tongass project area, and help the project planning team build a Proposed Action for this project, we asked for input in a variety of ways. In January, we developed a questionnaire and distributed it to approximately 1,070 people. We also created a public project website accessible from the [Tongass homepage](https://www.fs.usda.gov/tongass/)<sup>2</sup>. In February, we talked to local tribes, and visited elementary, middle and high school students in Kake, Petersburg and Wrangell. In March, we held four public meetings in Kake, Petersburg, and Wrangell. Through these channels we gathered input from the communities within the project area.

**If you would still like to provide input, there’s time!** See the contact information below for ways to share your ideas.

Here is a summary of the general themes from community input so far:

- ◆ Provide more recreation opportunities closer to communities
- ◆ Provide a steady supply of old-growth timber for harvest
- ◆ Provide a greater variety of small timber sales
- ◆ Provide individual tree sales
- ◆ Tailor pre-commercial thinning prescriptions and contract provisions, such as slash removal, to promote berry production
- ◆ Incorporate traditional/Tlingit names on road signs throughout the project area
- ◆ Turn closed roads into pedestrian trails and ATV trails
- ◆ Build roadside cabins near communities
- ◆ Develop a system of dispersed campsites along a multi-island kayak “trail”
- ◆ Build more 3-sided shelters
- ◆ Improve or build docks to access road systems or fishing spots
- ◆ Improve fish passage
- ◆ Provide more areas for commercial firewood cutting
- ◆ Maintain roads that access important subsistence areas
- ◆ Implement more stream restoration projects
- ◆ Seek partnership opportunities

Some suggestions we received are outside the scope of the project and are not listed above. Examples include suggested changes to Forest Plan direction, or policy decisions such as the status of the Roadless Rule, which is decided at the national level. Some suggested activities are outside the jurisdiction of the Forest Service (hunting regulations), or can be addressed through special use permitting such as meteorological towers. Other suggestions are general in nature and are not a ground-disturbing activity

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<sup>1</sup> Since our public meetings, the project name has been shortened from “Central Tongass Landscape Level Analysis” to simply “Central Tongass”.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/tongass/>



(no new roads, reduce logging, focus on trail maintenance rather than building new trail). And lastly, some activities are considered best-served by a separate environmental analysis, such as building a tramway or hydro development. A spreadsheet that catalogs all the public input since January is on the [project webpage](#)<sup>3</sup>.

## What is the Central Tongass Project?

The Central Tongass project is a landscape-scale project located on the Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts. Its purpose is to improve forest ecosystem health, help support community resiliency, and provide economic development through an integrated approach within the project area. These objectives will be met by implementing, over the next 10 to 15 years, a suite of activities (such as cabin construction, timber harvest, stream restoration, or road construction) identified by you and the Central Tongass planning team. To evaluate the environmental effects of the project, we will use condition-based National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis.

## What is condition-based NEPA?

The condition-based approach to NEPA, sometimes referred to as the “toolbox” method, utilizes an *if/then* approach to land management. **If** X condition exists on the ground **then** Y treatment (a project activity) will be implemented to reach the desired conditions. Before activity implementation, site-specific conditions such as slope aspect and steepness, elevation, and soil type, will guide how ground-disturbing activities may occur. If the implementation of a site-specific activity is expected to be outside the range of effects disclosed in the environmental analysis, additional analysis (and another decision by the Forest Supervisor) will be required.

## What will implementation look like for the Central Tongass Project?

The Central Tongass planning team will develop an implementation guide to accompany the environmental analysis that will be released for public comment this fall. The implementation guide will include a combination of tools, such as:

- A decision matrix to outline criteria for implementing each activity; and
- Several checklists:
  - **Field checklists** to complete before ground-disturbing activities occur;
  - An **annual implementation checklist** to ensure activities do not cumulatively exceed the anticipated effects authorized by the decision;
  - A **supporting documentation checklist** for specialists to ensure necessary field surveys have been completed; and
  - A **law, regulation and policy checklist** to ensure individual activities are consistent with NEPA and other federal laws and executive orders.

Lastly, we will have an annual public meeting to share implementation plans and accomplishments so you may remain engaged throughout the life of the project.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/projects/?cid=fseprd568085>



## What are the benefits of this approach?

A landscape-level project using condition-based NEPA allows for a final decision that is flexible, adaptive, and responsive to on-the-ground conditions over a large geographic area, while also integrating the diverse interests of communities within the project area into the long-term management of public lands. And because multiple projects will be implemented over the life of this decision (10 to 15 years), rather than just one project for traditional NEPA decisions, it will allow resource groups like Fisheries, Timber and Recreation to plan project logistics together. Benefits of this approach include sharing on-site resources (large equipment, vehicles, seasonal workforce, mobilization costs, and contractors), which saves money and provides a more efficient flow of work. This approach also provides “shovel ready” projects that will allow us to take advantage of short-term funding opportunities within our agency, as well as those of potential partners.

## What’s next?

Stay tuned for the Notice of Intent, published in the Federal Register, which will outline a Proposed Action based on your input. This publication will begin a 30-day comment period – an opportunity for you to provide additional feedback. We aim to have the NOI published in May. Its release will be advertised widely.

If you have more questions about the Central Tongass project, please contact Petersburg District Ranger David Zimmerman ([dlzimmerman@fs.fed.us](mailto:dlzimmerman@fs.fed.us)), or Team Leader Carey Case ([ccase@fs.fed.us](mailto:ccase@fs.fed.us)) at 907-772-3871.

## Stay in touch!

If you have ideas we have not captured, please send us your thoughts by **April 30<sup>th</sup>**.

**Mailing Address:** Petersburg Ranger District  
Central Tongass LLA  
PO Box 1328  
Petersburg, AK 99833

**E-Mail:** [comments-alaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-alaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us)

**Visit our project website and fill out a questionnaire:**

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/projects/?cid=fseprd568085>

**Sign up for project updates via e-mail:**

[https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=NEPA\\_53098\\_S](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?topic_id=NEPA_53098_S)

**Call or come visit your local Forest Service Ranger District office:**

Petersburg Ranger District  
907-772-3871

Wrangell Ranger District  
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