



A Transition Framework for Economic Diversification in Southeast Alaska

Key Message

USDA agencies in Alaska are working together to develop a Transition Framework that will support sustainable diversified economies for Southeast Alaska communities around forest restoration, renewable energy, fisheries and mariculture, subsistence, and tourism and recreation, while sustaining and transitioning a viable timber economy.

Background

As the ancestral lands of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian tribes, the Native people of Southeast Alaska have lived here in a sustainable way for thousands of years. The land is now predominately publicly owned and managed; approximately 70,000 residents are spread among 32 towns and villages, many accessible only by boat or plane. Residents are reliant on customary and traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering, as well as natural resource based industries. Historically the timber and fishing industries provided the backbone for the economy. Ongoing decline in timber harvest and recent changes in global economics present both challenges and opportunities for the communities in the region. As the predominant land manager in Southeast Alaska, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a critical role in the economic vitality of Southeast Alaska.

Current Situation

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has directed USDA agencies, led by Forest Service (FS) and Rural Development (RD), to develop a strategy known as the Transition Framework to help Southeast Alaska communities transition to a more diversified economy. Components of the transition will include renewable energy, forest restoration and young growth management, fisheries and mariculture, tourism and recreation, and subsistence. Work has been ongoing in the area of forest management, shifting towards multi-year stewardship contracts and young growth management.

A four-phased approach has been established for this Framework effort, with the completion of a Strategic Plan expected early in the summer of 2011.

In Phase 1, a local implementation team made up of Federal agencies has been formed to create the Transition Framework, which will look at a fuller suite of goods and services in Southeast Alaska to provide diversified jobs and community stability. The team will coordinate with State and local governments, tribal entities, local stakeholders, non-profit and for-profit sectors, etc., as the Framework is developed and implemented.

In Phase 2, we will assess the region's resources and opportunities that will contribute to sustainable regional economic development. Building on current assets (workforce and natural resources) and key economic sectors, we will look realistically at emerging economic clusters such as mariculture or renewable energy along with workforce training and other support needed.

Phase 3 will focus on the development of a Strategic Plan using the information and resources identified in the first two phases. We will identify ways to promote sustainable economic

development, and utilize USDA Programs to help stimulate growth of businesses and job creation. In Phase 4, implementation of the Strategic Plan will commence. During and after implementation, tracking and evaluation of efforts will be done to determine success.

Deliverables for this effort to date have included:

- A contract for Economic Asset Mapping and development of a Strategic Plan has been awarded to the Juneau Economic Development Council, and work has commenced.
- More than \$50 million in projects that could be moved forward now have been funded by RD and the Forest Service through a variety of grants, loans, and economic stimulus funds, rather than waiting until the Strategic Plan is finished.
- The environmental analysis for the first of several long-term stewardship contracts, Central Kupreanof, is nearing completion, and the project will be implemented in 2011.
- A Stewardship Workshop for local community members, potential operators, and federal employees and partners who will be involved in the initial long-term stewardship project was held in Kake, Alaska, in early October, 2010. Goals for the workshop were to establish understanding of the foundations of stewardship authorities, build and strengthen relationships among partners and participants, and set the Central Kupreanof project up for success so it provides benefits to both ecological and community health.

Website: http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/ro/projects-plans/transition_frame/index.shtml

More Information

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