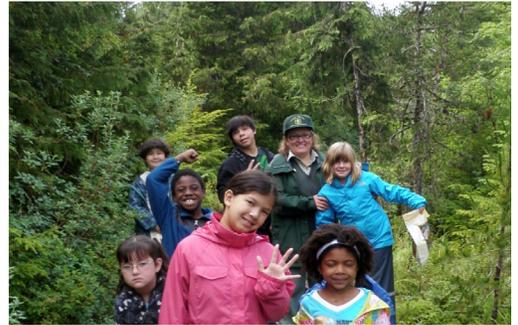


Healthy Communities and a Healthy Forest: The Tongass Integrated Plan

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Communities in Southeast Alaska are strongly tied to the land—socially, culturally, and economically. Many of these communities face growing challenges as the economy shifts and public expectations evolve regarding how the forest is used.



As the predominant land manager in the region, the Forest Service plays a critical role in the economic vitality of communities. For decades, the agency supported jobs and local economies largely through timber sales and road building. Today, the Forest Service is supporting opportunities in several resource sectors. Efforts are particularly focused on building opportunities in forest stewardship, outlined in the “Tongass Integrated Plan.”



The Tongass Integrated Plan includes timber sales, watershed restoration and habitat improvement, and road decommissioning and maintenance. It is founded on five key principles:

- 1) **Creating** immediate opportunities for a range of forest services and products, such as young growth harvest, biomass, or instream restoration work;
- 2) **Using** the existing industry and workforce capacity;
- 3) **Providing** a stable and consistent program of work to encourage new business investment;
- 4) **Emphasizing** collaboration, partnerships, and stewardship contracting; and
- 5) **Leveraging** resources and dedicating funding for all activities.

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Ultimately the Tongass will develop a 10-year integrated forest management plan and implementation strategy that furthers the transition to predominantly young growth management and restoration.

Projects that include a variety of forest management activities, offered in longer-term contracts, can increase local business capacity and local jobs. For example, wood byproducts from restoration and young growth management can be used for local biomass projects, reducing high energy costs and dependence on oil in the region’s rural communities.



Given the complexity of the issues facing Southeast Alaskan communities, a collaborative approach that brings together many perspectives is more important than ever. The Forest Service is working collaboratively with federal, state, tribal, and regional partners to implement the “USDA Investment Strategy for Creating Jobs and Healthy Communities in Southeast Alaska.” The strategy focuses on economic diversification, revitalizing communities, and restoring public lands. The Tongass Integrated Plan is a key planning document in this overall effort.



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Implementation & Forest Stewardship Activities



The Tongass Integrated Plan: Implementation

The future of forest stewardship will be built on the tools, capacities, and expertise of the present industry. Retooling and diversifying the existing workforce will be critical to this transition—history shows that losing the skills and infrastructure of the current forest products industry makes it very difficult for a new industry to emerge.

Projects will focus on combined opportunities in concentrated areas, rather than spreading opportunities across a geographically disparate range. This approach creates advantages for local contractors, reducing equipment mobilization and demobilization needs. It also allows the agency to leverage and stretch its own funding, thereby supporting more projects across the Forest. Such an approach requires early collaboration and establishing shared priorities.



The success of the Tongass Integrated Plan will hinge on collaboration and partnerships. Collaborative groups can help identify community needs and interests, build public agreement, and bring a strong understanding of workforce capacity during the design of a project. Partnering across agencies, between landowners, and with non-governmental entities offers the opportunity to leverage resources and accomplish more work than might otherwise be possible.

Stewardship authorities provide a more flexible way to offer, package, and implement a suite of forest management projects. Key components of a stewardship contract include best value (awarding contracts on criteria other than just price), exchange of goods for services, retention of receipts, local benefit, and the ability to award contracts for up to 10 years. The program of work can be implemented through a variety of contracts, including traditional service, timber, and integrated stewardship.



Successful implementation of the Tongass Integrated Plan will depend on local community engagement and the support of USDA Investment Strategy partners.



The Tongass Integrated Plan: Forest Stewardship Activities

- **Timber Sales:** Commercial timber harvest provides fiber to the existing forest products industry from both old growth and young growth sales. Over time, the Tongass will increase investments in young growth and focus on a smaller, high-value old growth timber sale program.
- **Pre-commercial Thinning:** Pre-commercial thinning in timber development land use designations (LUDs) produces trees for future timber production with an average of about 6,000 acres per year.
- **Wildlife Management (Terrestrial Restoration):** Improving forest stand conditions in previously harvested areas benefits wildlife habitat and accelerates return to old growth forest conditions. Treatments will take place mostly in non-development LUDs.
- **Watershed Restoration:** Fish passage remediation, road drainage improvements, riparian vegetation restoration, channel stabilization, and aquatic habitat improvement enhance wildlife and fish populations.
- **Road Storage and Decommissioning:** Decommissioning roads and restoring impacted areas to a more natural state improves connectivity and decreasing environmental effects.



Upcoming Projects

Upcoming Projects — 2012

In the coming year, the Tongass National Forest expects the following timber and forest stewardship projects to be implemented or offered. Projects are organized geographically by ranger district and include a diverse range of activities and scale.

Wrangell

- **Frenchie timber sale** — Awarded in the fall of 2011, this project includes harvest of ~23 MMBF of old growth timber and replacement of six red pipes (culverts that do not pass fish) and will generate retained receipts for restoration.

Craig

- **Twelvemile watershed restoration** — This partnership project includes 100 acres of wildlife and riparian thinning treatments, 1.5 miles of instream restoration, road storage, invasive plant removal, and up to 400 acres of pre-commercial thinning.

Thorne Bay

- **Heceta second growth project** — Awarded in the fall of 2011, the project is a 7.5 MMBF commercial thin of young growth timber on ~350 acres. The timber will be harvested this year or next, generating retained receipts that will be invested in watershed restoration projects.
- **Dargon Point second growth project** — NEPA will be completed this summer for a commercial thin on 70 acres of young growth on Prince of Wales Island.
- **Big Thorne** — This project is a multi-year timber sale component of a larger stewardship effort that will include restoration, enhancement, and stewardship activities. Project NEPA will be finished this year and could include up to 16 MMBF of young growth timber.
- **Luck Lake/Eagle watershed restoration** — NEPA will be completed for aquatic habitat improvement projects on three tributaries and the main stem of Luck Creek, decommissioning of a temporary road, and road improvement projects for aquatic passage and water quality.

Sitka

- **Sitkoh River stream restoration** — This collaboratively developed and funded project will restore over 1,800 feet of critical salmon habitat in the Sitkoh watershed, one of the highest priority watersheds on the Tongass.
- **Peril Strait** — Collaboratively developed with the local Sitka Community Stewardship group, the project includes pre-commercial thinning on ~2,000 acres, large woody debris placement in 2.2 miles of stream, 150 acres of riparian thinning, and 0.4 miles of trail construction.
- **Starrigavan terrestrial restoration project** — This collaborative project with a local NGO, the City of Sitka, and the public will improve deer accessibility in young growth through canopy gaps and 10-15 engineered game trails.
- **Starrigavan watershed restoration project** — This project will construct or refurbish six coho rearing ponds and replace three stream crossing structures that currently inhibit fish passage.

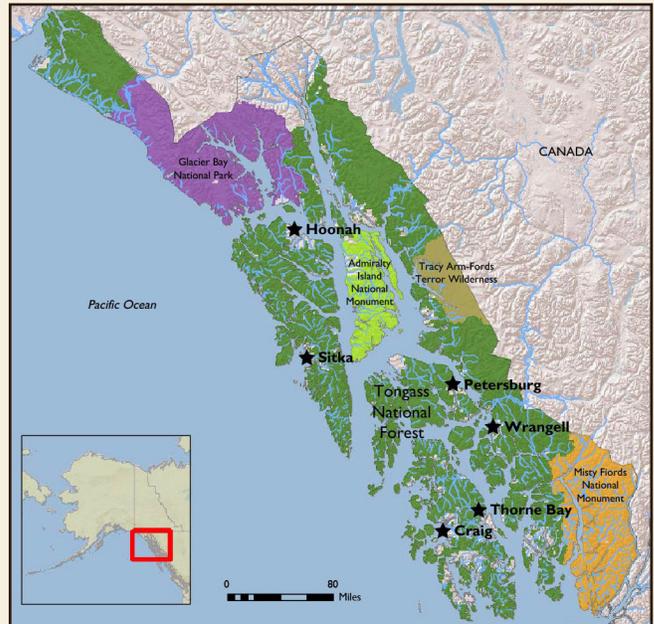


Image credit: Wild Salmon Center



Upcoming Projects & Monitoring



Petersburg

- **Kake community collaborative stewardship projects** — These projects will result in over 300 acres of pre-commercial thinning, four miles of trail maintenance (over two years), 20 miles of road maintenance, and two small timber sales using retained receipts.
- **Kake aquatic restoration** — Restoration of instream habitat through placement of ~10 large woody debris structures will be implemented by youth from Kake.
- **Tonka timber sale** — The project includes a timber sale for up to ~38 MMBF of timber on Lindenberg Peninsula, Kupreanof Island. Stewardship proposals may include road and trail maintenance, pre-commercial thinning, and terrestrial restoration.



Second growth commercial thin at Winter Harbor



Hoonah

- **Kennel Creek** — This series of projects includes a small old growth timber sale, 350 acres of thinning to improve wildlife habitat, ~20 acres of riparian thinning, placement of large woody debris in Kennel Creek, and replacement of five red pipes.



Forest-wide

- **Various small and micro sales** — Projects include 3-5 MMBF of timber offered for smaller operators per year.
- **Pre-commercial thinning** — Crews will thin approximately 5,500-6,200 acres in areas across the forest.



Monitoring Progress

Monitoring and adaptive management will be critical to successful forest stewardship and restoration on the Tongass National Forest. The ability to learn from past management activities and incorporate lessons learned into future treatments will greatly improve both the ecological outcomes on the ground and collaborative relationships with local communities and partners. Many of the forest stewardship projects currently in the planning and implementation phases have been developed with a local collaborative group. In addition to monitoring the ecological effectiveness of treatments, the Tongass is committed to multiparty monitoring, which will include discussions with diverse partners about shared learning from an economic, social, and ecological perspective.

