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*Sent on behalf of the Tongass Transition Collaborative*

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## Tongass Transition Collaborative Reflects on Progress Since Release of Tongass Advisory Committee Recommendations

KETCHIKAN, Alaska – Exactly two years ago, the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) reached consensus on its recommendations to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on developing an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable forest management strategy for the Tongass National Forest. In addition to recommendations regarding the proposed Tongass Land & Resource Management Plan Amendment, the Committee also provided advice regarding implementation and monitoring of the Tongass transition.

Following conclusion of the TAC's effort, many members of the group, along with other individuals from the region, have continued to work together as the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC) to build on the common ground achieved through the TAC process. The purpose of the TTC is to give communities, stakeholders, other landowners, and partners a way to work constructively with the Forest Service. Through this role, the group represents an independent investment in supporting the Tongass National Forest as it works to implement the set of complex and long-term recommendations put forth by the TAC. TTC co-chair, Andrew Thoms, stressed the group's role of "helping develop ideas and conversation among staff to develop an approach focused on what we *can* do, as opposed to what we *cannot* do."

Last week, the TTC met to review progress to date and identify tangible next steps to ensure opportunities continue for land managers and community members alike. Reflecting on the 60+ implementation recommendations put forward by the TAC, today's TTC members are impressed by and supportive of the great strides the Agency has made in changing its culture and navigating legal and regulatory constraints to create beneficial outcomes for the towns and villages in the region. "This is a systematic process of culturally shifting as an agency, and I'm already seeing this shift," Forest Supervisor, Earl Stewart, reflected, "The best thing that the TTC can offer is the grace to operate differently."

Throughout all of its deliberations, the TAC strongly emphasized the importance of communities and the socioeconomic implications of a transition to primarily young growth forest management. In line with this focus, the group recommended the implementation of workforce development and training to create a local, multi-skilled workforce to perform all facets of young growth forest management, including implementation of the recommendation to improve accuracy of stand-level inventory and growth data. The progress made toward these recommendations, through the Workforce Academy and

young growth inventory program, exemplify the strides taken toward achieving the TAC's implementation recommendations.

Equally important to the TAC was the need for improved monitoring efforts that track the flow of benefits to Southeast Alaska communities. Members stressed the value of place-based monitoring and social learning at the project-level throughout implementation of the new Plan, once finalized, to affect change through adaptation and clearly demonstrate local benefits of projects. Work associated with this socioeconomic monitoring has begun, with the initiation of a social benefits baseline study that will assess the current and recent past socioeconomic conditions in the region, and identify the effects of forest management activities to communities, including employment, personal income, and overall economic activity.

In the coming months, the TTC will continue to track progress toward achieving the TAC recommendations, and identifying opportunities to engage industry, forest managers, conservation groups, and community members to implement emerging activities. In the words of Forest Supervisor Stewart, "We are all in this together – through collective vision, effort, and action."

For more information about the Tongass Transition Collaborative, visit <http://www.merid.org/tongassimplementation>.

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