



Above: Forest Training Academy

Achieving Tongass Advisory Committee Recommendations

**An Update Provided by the Tongass Transition Collaborative,
May 22, 2017**

Two years ago, the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) reached consensus on a set of recommendations for developing an ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable forest management strategy for the Tongass National Forest, which included components of the Proposed Land & Resource Management Plan, as well as recommendations for implementation, investment, and monitoring of the transition to primary young growth-based forest management. These recommendations represent the first consensus collaborative agreement on Tongass policy for timber and forest management in the history of Southeast Alaska.

Many former TAC members, along with other individuals from the region, have continued to work together as the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC) to continue to build on common ground and fulfill an important role as a catalyst for change by encouraging progress and tracking initiatives that lead toward achievement of a successful transition on the Tongass and throughout Southeast Alaska. Such continued investment of diverse stakeholders represents a new way of doing business in Alaska – this direction has the power to create much more certainty for all parties involved than the conflict that has characterized the past. The TTC commends the Forest Service and its partners for swift action to address several of the TAC's recommendations, and look forward to continued progress on these important issues. There will be challenges moving forward, but with the support of key stakeholders, decision makers, and agency leadership, we can work through any difficulties and build a stronger region, viable rural communities, and forest management that also conserves the key ecological values of Alaska. Below and on the following pages, the TTC offers a reflection on progress made to date on several projects, initiated and implemented by a variety of individuals and entities, that align closely with the TAC recommendations.

Implementing the Transition: A Culture of Learning

Agency Leadership and Collaboration

“The TAC expects Forest Service...leadership at every level to encourage and support the development of a multi-stakeholder forest collaborative to help maintain the vision of the Amendment, provide resources to the Agency...and improve and complement the monitoring efforts necessary for accountability and learning.”

– TAC Recommendations, pg. 15

Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC): The TTC, with broad membership of leaders from key stakeholder groups in Southeast Alaska, offers a way to work constructively with the US Forest Service (USFS) and directly engage in Tongass National Forest management. Through this role, the TTC has helped catalyze activities to advance regional forest management goals, including timber sales and planning, restoration, and fisheries management, among others. The TTC, with continued support from USFS leadership at the Forest and Regional levels, is fully invested in a successful transition to young growth, and to the well-being of the communities that depend on the Tongass.

On-the-Ground Collaborative Efforts: Collaboration is beginning to be the norm on the Tongass. At the regional level, the TTC and Tongass Collaborative Stewardship Group (TCSG) provide direction and identify opportunities for change. At the local level, collaboratives such as the Prince of Wales Landscape Assessment Team (POWLAT), the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, and the Hyدابург Joint Chiefs Project represent landscape-scale, community-based approaches to forest and watershed project planning and implementation.

Inclusion, Transparency, and Shared Learning

“The TAC expects the Agency to move to true collaborative planning for young growth projects. Collaborative planning has the advantage of using knowledge...to design projects that will work economically,...achieve the desired habitat objectives, and...identify areas critical to community development...” – TAC Recommendations, pg. 16

Engaging Stakeholders On-the-Ground: In the spring and fall of 2016, the TTC and TCSG co-hosted a series of field visits on Prince of Wales, Kosciusko, and Heceta Islands. These field trips represented the first time a diverse group, comprised of staff and leadership from the USFS and US Congress, timber operators, regional landowners, non-profit organizations, and community members, were brought together to discuss the future of young growth management in the field, with a dedicated commitment to craft and implement solutions.

Industry Coordination: The USFS signed a collaborative agreement with the Alaska Forestry Association to introduce a more customer-centric approach to sale planning, incorporate industry input early in the sale planning process, and ultimately achieve more cost-effective timber sales. With the agreement in place, and efforts underway to secure funding, this work will build on the collective knowledge of USFS staff and timber operators to identify implementation steps to meet supply needs of the current industry, now and into the future.



Left: Industry and Forest Service staff discuss the realities of timber sales and project management on Kosciusko Island.

Internal USFS Coordination: When considering treatment options, USFS specialists may have differing views on the appropriate options to achieve mutual objectives. Starting in the spring of 2016, silviculturalists and wildlife biologists have convened joint field visits to identify treatments that create maximum benefits in the most cost-effective ways. Such site visits entail frank discussions on what *can* happen, and cultivate a culture of experimentation—both key to determining what works best on varying Tongass landscapes. As specialists agree at the conceptual level, line officers will be able proceed with opportunistic projects that demonstrate success.

Coordination with Other Landowners

"There are unrealized opportunities for cost savings through coordination among adjacent or nearby landowners... It will require an intentional effort by the USFS to initiate dialogue with other landowners when creating future silviculture and harvest plans to encourage coordination across ownership boundaries."

– TAC Recommendations, pg. 17

All Lands Group: The All Lands Group, comprised of the USFS, State Division of Forestry, Sealaska Corporation, Alaska Mental Health Trust Lands, and University of Alaska Trust Lands, is coming together on May 31, 2017 in Juneau to discuss coordination of timber sales and opportunities for shared infrastructure and cost savings. The reengagement of this group is proof of a cultural shift that is taking place – landowners view each other as true partners.

Good Neighbor Authority: In order to navigate the limited capacity and restrictions surrounding USFS timber sales, the State of Alaska is working on a project layout on Kosciusko through a special project agreement utilizing Good Neighbor Authority. Once signed, the State will be ready to implement, with the goal of having a sale ready for the first quarter of FY2018. A similar process is being proposed in the Ketchikan Ranger District.

Joint 5-year Timber Schedule: The All Lands Group is developing a joint 5-year timber sale schedule that will allow for out-year pre-

dictions of when sales are happening, where, and by what landowner, organized by young and old growth. Ultimately a longer-term sale schedule will allow for more certainty for industry; in the meantime, this joint schedule will provide an overview of gaps and opportunities for each landowner to step in.

Infrastructure Sharing: As landowners work together on coordinated sale planning, they are also seeking opportunities for cost efficiencies through shared infrastructure. Road-use agreements are a first step in that process – a pilot project for road-use is emerging on Kosciusko Island, which is creating pressure for a comprehensive agreement on Wrangell Island. Other infrastructure sharing opportunities are being identified through the development of infrastructure maps for all five working circles, which highlight infrastructure that is pertinent for all landowners.

The maps are currently in circulation for review and comment.

Below: Logging infrastructure like this log transfer facility can be shared between landowners for cost efficiencies.



Cross-District Coordination and Strategic Planning

"...A scattershot approach to planning sales [and projects] is not cost effective. Stronger coordination across districts, and between districts and programs, will be critical..." – TAC Recommendations, pg. 20

Landscape-Level Analysis: The USFS is developing a long-term plan for the management of federal lands on Prince of Wales Island, with the goal of addressing healthy timber, watersheds, tourism, recreation, and economic stability on the island. The POW-LAT is a community-based collaborative responsible for identifying projects and sales for the next 5-10 years. The USFS is anticipating a similar landscape-level planning approach in all five working circles, with the next process proposed for Northwest Revilla Island.

Watershed-Scale Restoration: In addition to landscape-scale planning for timber sales and projects, there are also opportunities to coordinate across Districts and USFS specialists for larger-scale restoration projects. For example, receipts from timber sales can support in-stream restoration work, such as the Luck Creek Salmon Habitat project, funded in part by Big Thorne Timber Sale receipts.

Investing in the Future: Research and Action On-the-Ground

Workforce Training and Development

“There is an opportunity to work with local governments, tribes, non-profits, businesses, and the State to create a local, multi-skilled, cross-trained workforce to perform all facets of young growth forest management, habitat restoration, and local utilization.” – TAC Recommendations, pg. 16

Forestry Training Academy: For two years in a row, the USFS, Alaska Division of Forestry, Alaska Division of Economic Development, Sealaska Timber, Spruceroor Community Development Fund, and Sustainable Southeast Partnership worked together to provide training in basic forestry skills, best practices, safety requirements, and inventory protocol. 20 students completed the training, gaining both field experience and employment opportunities.

Local Hires: Following the Training Academy, 13 graduates were hired by the USFS, Alaska Division of Forestry, and Native Corporations. The attention to finding job placements was a critical part of the program, and all graduates who sought a job received one. Moving forward, the USFS will continue to use

authority granted by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) for local hires.

Continued Training Opportunities: The State of Alaska and USFS State & Private Forestry are collaborating to continue support of local workforce development, including continued iterations of the Training Academy, as well as programs targeted at providing rural youth work ethics and basic jobs skills needed to be successful in any job, such as the Teaching Rural Alaska Leaders and Students (TRAYLS) program. Planning and implementation is underway for forestry day activities for local junior high and high school classes – providing rural Alaskan youth important job skill preparation, as well as a potential in-road to career paths in forestry.

Inventory Investment

“Young growth resource data evaluated by the TAC carries a very high margin of uncertainty... The TAC recommends investment in stand-level field work to: 1) ground-proof and refine inventory and growth data; 2) improve inventory accuracy; and 3) increase reliability of forecast projections...” – TAC Recommendations, pg. 24

Challenge Cost-Share Inventory: Through the Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the State of Alaska, significant progress has been made in collecting inventory data for young growth stands – over 2000 plots were completed in the first field season alone, with 1300 acres to be completed in 2017. Old growth inventory, including cruising protocol, standards development, economic assessment, and on-the-ground inventory of 5000 acres, will begin this summer as well. This will further integrate the work of the two government organizations and their forestry crews to improve overall cooperation and information sharing. Stream assessment work is also underway, representing an important metric for fall-

down attributable to riparian issues. Significant funding for LiDAR surveying has also been leveraged with non-profit organizations, the US Geological Survey, and other agencies.



Above: Collecting field data.

Research Investments

“There is limited information available on growing, managing, harvesting, processing, manufacturing, and marketing of young growth timber within Southeast Alaska... Research activities should include significant and meaningful private sector engagement, guidance, and leadership...” – TAC Recommendations, pg. 24



Above: Viking biobrick machine uses wood biomass byproducts from old growth harvests to produce fuel. Lessons from these approaches to biomass utilization can be applied to young growth in the future.

Product and Market Development: In order to lay the ground work on what a young growth inventory might look like in 20 years, a position paper was prepared on the use of Alaska second growth forests in the construction of mass timber (i.e., cross laminated timber). Another recent study assessed the wood quality of Alaska young growth to identify emerging young growth products and markets. Such information can inform cooperative projects regarding market development, material testing, and infrastructure and equipment needs.

Use of Wood Biomass: Wood biomass has been the focus of several recent meetings, including the Alaska Wood Energy Conference, and the Alaska Board of Forestry and Alaska Society of American Foresters meetings. Sustainable Southeast Partnership also released a [handbook](#) focused on biomass-heated greenhouses.

Learning from the Past: Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Monitoring and Research

“The TAC’s commitment to creating conditions for Tongass communities to thrive is reflected in its recommendations toward robust and active monitoring and adaptive management... Measuring and telling the story of socioeconomic impacts of Forest policy and practice can build support for sustained investments.”

– TAC Recommendations, pg. 27

Socioeconomic Monitoring: A Cooperative Agreement was recently finalized between the Alaska Division of Forestry and Ecosystem Workforce Program (EWP) at University of Oregon to develop a long-term socioeconomic monitoring plan for the Tongass transition. Over the next 2 years, EWP will work with stakeholders to develop and implement a

detailed monitoring plan that assesses social and economic change in affected communities, identifying the effects of forest management activities to communities, including employment, personal income, and overall economic activity.

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About the Tongass Transition Collaborative

The purpose of the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC) is to give communities, stakeholders, other landowners, and partners a way to work constructively with the US Forest Service to achieve transition goals prescribed by Secretary Vilsack's July 2013 Memorandum, and detailed in recommendations produced by the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC). Our shared vision is one in which Southeast Alaska is comprised of prosperous, resilient communities that have the opportunity to predictably use and benefit from the diversity of forest resources to achieve the cultural, social, economic, and ecological health of the region for current and future generations.

Current TTC members include:

- Jaeleen Araujo, Sealaska Corporation
- Sarah Campen, Tongass Collaborative Stewardship Group
- Les Cronk, Southeast Stevedoring Corp.
- Brian Kleinhenz, Terra Verde, Inc.
- Chris Maisch, State of Alaska Division of Forestry
- Eric Nichols, Alcan Forest Products
- Conor Reynolds, The Nature Conservancy
- Carol Rushmore, City and Borough of Wrangell
- Erin Steinkruger, Prince of Wales Island Community Member
- Andrew Thoms, Sitka Conservation Society
- Austin Williams, Trout Unlimited

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

About Meridian Institute

Meridian Institute provided facilitation and coordination support for the Tongass Advisory Committee, and continues to provide support for the Tongass Transition Collaborative. Meridian is a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help people solve complex and controversial problems, make informed decisions, and implement solutions that improve lives, the economy, and the environment. Meridian accomplishes its mission by applying collaborative problem-solving approaches including facilitation, mediation, and other strategic consultation services. Meridian works at the local, national, and international levels and focuses on a wide range of issues related to natural resources and environment, science and technology, agriculture and food security, sustainability, global stability, and health. For more information, please visit www.merid.org.



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