

The Tongass Collaborative
Membership Meeting – October 23-24, 2025
Ketchikan, AK at the Southeast Alaska Discovery Center
MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Participants (for all or part of the meeting)

In Person Attendees:

Quinn Aboudara – Shaan Seet
Tessa Axelson – Alaska Forest Association
Steve Belinda – Black Deer Foundation
Bob Christianson – Sustainable Southeast Partnership
Clarence Clark – Timber consultant
Mike Cooney – Alaska Division of Forestry
Sarah Dahlstrom – Viking Lumber
Natalie Dawson – Alaska Venture Fund
Jeremy Douse – AK Department of Natural Resources
Jason Gubatayao - Sealaska
Arielle Halpern – Tlingit & Haida
Jeff Hermans – Mental Health Trust
Tom Hewitt – Geospatial program lead
Michael Kampnich – The Nature Conservancy
Brian Kleinhenz – Terra Verde
Jen Leahy – Trout Unlimited
Matt Lucrenz – UAF Extension, Instruction for Alaska lumber grading program,
Anthony Mallot – individual
Barbara Miranda - Tongass National Forest, Deputy Forest Supervisor
Monique Nelson – Tongass National Forest, Forest Supervisor
Eric Nichols – Alcan Lumber
Austin Otis – Ketchikan Borough, Mayor
Chuck Pool - individual
Paul Slenkamp – Cape Fox
Greg Staunton – AK Department of Forestry, Area Forrester
Andrew Thoms - Sitka Conservation Society
Robert Venables – Southeast Conference
Emily Pound – Sitka Trail Works

Online Participants:

Delilah Brigham – Tongass National Forest
Mike Jones – Organized Village of Kasaan
Priscila Morris – Tongass National Forest
Julia Nave – The Nature Conservancy
Dan O’Leary – Tongass National Forest / Regional Office
Katie Riley – Sitka Conservation Society
Jillian Schuyler – The Nature Conservancy
Michael Shepard – Tongass National Forest
Jill Weitz – Tlingit & Haida
Ralph Wolfe – Tlingit & Haida

Staff:

Connie Lewis – TTC facilitator
Aaron Morrison – Southeast Conference
Devany Plentovich – Deerstone Consulting: Notetaker, Facilitation Support

Meeting Objectives Reviewed

- 1) Updates on what is happening on the Tongass and across the forested landscape of Southeast Alaska.
- 2) Develop actions items from the meeting to advance the primary goals of “forest health”, “habitat health” and “community economic health” in Southeast Alaska.
- 3) Grow and enhance the effectiveness of The Tongass Collaborative.

Rules of the Road

Participants were asked to abide by the following “rules of the road” during the meeting:

- Check “positions” at the door – invited in to contribute wisdom, expertise
- Listen to others and digest what they are saying
- Challenge and debate ideas not people
- Give succinct answers and manage time
- Work together to develop solutions
- Enjoy the gathering and the people participating

The Tongass Collaborative (TTC) Overview

The group has distant roots in the Federal Tongass Advisory Committee (the TAC) that was convened to develop recommendations to implement Secretary Vilsack’s 2014 directive to transition the Tongass National Forest from primarily old growth-based forest management to primarily young growth management. It then became the Tongass Transition Committee to provide recommendations about how to implement the 2016 Forest Plan amendment which codified the TAC’s work. A couple of years ago the group decided to pull away from the transition word since the focus has broadened – with the people of

the region working together for the betterment of the Tongass National Forest and the broader forested landscape in the region – striving to ensure that these lands are managed for the benefit of the people who live here with practices that also result in forest and habitat health. Southeast Conference, which serves as the administrative home and facilitator for TTC maintains a website that contains all the documentation from previous initiatives and meetings. The TTC focuses on the links among forest health, habitat health, and community economic health – all largely dependent on how our forested lands are managed. We are here to find information and understanding first – and consensus where possible, but we are invited for our insights, not our positions. We want to make the best recommendations that will drive policy change and incentivize the programs that will make a difference in the wellbeing of our communities.

Timber Supply Industry Panel

Tessa Axelson, Alaska Forest Association (AFA) Executive Director, who organized the panel, introduced herself, provided background on the AFA) and welcomed the panelists. She clarified that AFA represents forest production across all of Alaska but only speaks on behalf of its members - it does not speak for all of the forest products industry.

Panelists:

- Clarence Clark – Timber Consultant
- Sarah Dahlstrom – Viking Timber
- Jason Gubatayao – Sealaska Timber
- Matt Labrenz – Timber grading program spokesperson
- Eric Nichols – Alcan and AFA Timber Committee chair

Eric Nichols, Alcan - Eric briefly reflected on the history of the industry in Alaska, which has long been characterized by boom-and-bust cycles in timber supply. Prior to the beginning of the pulp mill era there was a plywood mill in Juneau that provided spruce for airplanes during World War two. In the 1950's there were pulp mills in Ketchikan and Sitka that had long term contracts with the USFS. The late 1970s saw the beginning of a timber boom derived from the passages of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The Mental Health Trust extended that timber boom when it received some land.

There has always been a demand for timber and pulp, e.g., from Native Corporations, Asia, and for the lower 48. The industry relies heavily on the USFS for supply to meet the demand, but the Agency has not been a reliable partner. There is a 4-year cycle on timber supply based on the priorities of each Federal administration, which makes it difficult to invest in the industry because of the uncertainty about supply stability. Given the current supply situation, Alcan is a just a couple of quarters away from having to decide if they will be going out of business.

Jason Gubatayao, Sealaska – The passage of the 2014 lands bill opened the door for 70,000 more acres being available for potential timber production and triggered thinking about how to manage the land to keep timber operations going. During the wait for the land transfers to take place there was an emphasis on sales such as Big Thorne and Icy Bay that came with 10-year timeframes. In 2013-2014 Sealaska was

harvesting young growth, and it was profitable. Landowners do not dictate what is merchantable. Sealaska was able to find niches that were merchantable, but their operations were shut down in 2021. The factors for the decision to suspend operations were similar to Eric's – e.g., remote camps, high turnover in the labor force, etc. Unlike Alcan, Sealaska was not reliant on a different landowner, which allowed for longer term planning due to a consistent supply. However, during the shutdown Sealaska transitioned away from timber production into the carbon sequestration market and restoration to mitigate adverse effects from prior harvests.

Sarah Dahlstrom – Consistency is essential to Viking's family business – knowing how much they can harvest and what is needed by customers. However, supply has not been consistent for quite a while. Twelve years ago, they received an award for being the largest running mill in AK – supplying good year-round jobs, and wood to the lower 48, harvesting 1000 acres every year with 90 people employed.

Clarence Clark – Clarence's career provides a perspective into how the timber industry evolved over time. His trajectory started in the late 70's as a seasonal USFS employee. He subsequently worked in the Coffman Cove pulp mill work camp during which time they were harvesting 45mm board feet per year. Practices at the time were to log to the stream banks, remove all woody debris from fish streams and to clean every stream by hand. He transitioned in 1984 to road building, then to a logging company in Coffman Cove which logged 55 M board feet in six months. Rocky Mountain Helicopter logging grew from one helicopter to four helicopters, harvesting 80 – 100 M board feet per year. He then worked as a consultant laying out timber harvests in village corporations through the 1990's and worked for the State of AK DOF developing timber sales with the USFS. This was the last blip of relatively large-scale timber production on the Tongass. He left the DOF in 2015 to return to consulting, working on the Edna Bay good neighbor authority timber sale. After the Mental Health Trust land exchange he started laying out timber sales and working with AFA.

Tessa Axelson – There is a long history of small timber operators in the region for example for home building and for a variety of niche markets. These small mills are very important to the island and other remote areas. It is important to integrate small and large-scale operations. Small mills look to Alcan and other large-scale operation for how process young growth. The Dry Creek Mill is a particularly good example of an enterprise that is working with young growth. It is providing a model for how to utilize the entire tree. There are a variety of small mills in the region that operate close to year-round as well as a few seasonal commercial mills and numerous small personal mills for personal use. These small operations struggle with supply – the majority of which is old growth. They are trying to find a way to use young growth, but it is difficult. They will cut anything if they can to make a living.

Q&A and Discussion, Key Points from the Panel:

- **Activity in the small mill space** currently includes small projects with the USFS utilizing mobile dimension mills and band sawmills; beach salvage; a business that makes high quality bowls; orders for high school projects and community projects; municipalities that are looking to address housing issues by supporting kit style homes etc. Mills are taking advantage of a new style of building with what is available. Having a kiln in proximity can be advantageous, and for example would be useful on POW.

- **Keys to Success – a guaranteed supply and a functional road system** to get to their supply are critical key for all these small businesses. They desire the stability and predictability that would come from a long-term, non-politicized planning process that actually delivered the kind of consistency that drives business success.
- **The new lumber grading program** is a way for local people to get certified. Village corporations and building contractors who also have a mill can benefit as they try to utilize local lumber to rebuild after storms.
- **Sealaska in a post timber era** is examining priorities and building a broad network of partners. The goals include commercial thinning, promoting wildlife habitat, and partnering with Tribal organizations to build more homes.
- **Costs are another key consideration.** Bonding, roads (which can cost \$250,000 per mile), as well as commercial thinning can add up to as much as \$3 million dollars upfront to get the first log to scale. Environmental constraints also increase costs. Large harvesters can more easily manage – for example, small operators cannot build roads.
- **Viking Lumber’s contribution to the regional and national economy** is significant. 70% is western hemlock transported to Bellingham WA where a year-round factory produces garage doors, trim, railing, finish lumber, etc. Alaskan Western Red Cedar which is beautiful, durable, and has anti-rot qualities, is sent to 40 states. Texas gets 99% of its red cedar from Viking – for shakes, gazebos, etc. Sitka Spruce, which is a commodity, supplies NASA wind tunnels, cone heads on subs and missiles, and helicopter blades. Old growth Sitka Spruce is used for music wood, e.g., Steinway pianos. Products from the mill are used to help build roads. Chips are used locally for bricks, and in local schools in Craig for biomass energy. In addition to the significant expense associated with roads, Viking uses helicopters (which cost \$15,000/ hour to operate) for some sales. Insurance costs have tripled 2020. Health insurance is high and going higher. Cost to retrain a sawyer can be about \$250,000 in training and lost productivity.
- **The Dry Creek Mill**, which has been in business for 30 years, produces about 1M board feet per year. It is undoubtedly the best set-up small mill is AK for efficiency. However, it’s early years were a struggle, with decades of trial and error; success did not happen overnight. The mill is surrounding by State Forest which has been able to consistently provide supply. It is notable that the State is not limited by NEPA to get sales out fast.
- **Management as an old growth forest with an old growth harvest rotation** was offered as a possible way to supply timber for the businesses that want to produce jobs and products, from the perspective that Red Cedar is the best wood in the world and should be used as such. (See #logourwaybacktooldgrowth). It was suggested that the immediate supply crisis needs to be solved before getting to potential management as an old growth forest. There was also acknowledgement that old growth management is complicated and takes a lot of thought and planning.

Tessa’s summary of a few important takeaways:

1. We are in a complex environment with lots of opportunities and costs.
2. To ensure longevity there needs to be a commitment to supply for micro and small mills

3. Operators do not make policy decisions – landowners do
4. Wood that comes out of the Tongass makes a significant contribution to regional economic health and national security
5. Jobs are reliant on the industry and there could be a lot more
6. Significant challenges will continue to exist
7. Supply, supply, supply is the primary factor for businesses to plan and thrive
8. Industry looks different across the state

Steve Belinda – Blacktail Deer Foundation Update

The Blacktail Deer Foundation (an outgrowth of the Mule Deer Foundation) focuses on habitat restoration and conservation for Sitka Black-Tailed Deer in Southeast AK. The Foundation has a master stewardship agreement with the USFS under which they have one 10-year and one 5-year contract. Most stewardship agreements are for 5 to 10 years and in many cases can be renewed. Nationwide there are 500-600 stewardship agreement projects. These agreements are for habitat conservation. Of the seven specific tasks that can be authorized timber production is not one, but forest products and timber production can be a by-product of allowable wildlife habitat and watershed restoration work.

The Foundation is actively working with USFS staff in SE AK, prioritizing projects to maximize local Blacktail deer populations through monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of treatments and to align with USFS priorities.

The decline in deer populations on POW has resulted in a focus on stem exclusion - precommercial thinning and commercial thinning for the purposes of improving forage production, availability and accessibility, and to accelerate old growth. There are four projects currently underway on POW – two pre commercial thins on 1841 acres and two commercial thins on 88 acres.

There is a significant emphasis on modeling and monitoring. A GIS consultant was hired to look at topography, and vegetation, which along with management history, stand composition, and hunter access provides the inputs for modeling to select high and medium priority areas for potential impact. A stakeholder group has been created to inform the modeling.

By experimenting with different approaches, the intent over the next three years is to test a proof of concept that results in a scalable and adaptable approach for treatment on 2nd growth and that aligns with USFS priorities (resource management, economic development industry security, jobs, public access, subsistence uses, recreation, etc.). It will require increasing capacity, e.g., through shared positions with the USFS, an entrepreneurial spirit and helping to get “on the ground” projects out the door. Potential metrics of success include forest product yield, economic impact, deer habitual quality, and environmental outcomes.

Q&A and Discussion, Key Points:

What emerged from the discussion following Steve's presentation was that there are differing views about balancing priorities - especially timber production versus habitat improvements for the benefit of deer. One perspective is that there are plenty of deer, that timber production should be emphasized, and that steps taken to improve deer habitat (such as thinning) are expensive and may be of questionable value. Another perspective is that we still have a lot to learn about how different timber management approaches impact habitat quality, connectivity, etc. and ultimately productivity for deer, salmon and other species – and that further high-quality research is important to build our understanding so that we can make more informed decisions about the actual trade-offs.

Brian Kleinhenz – Southeast Alaska Young Growth Working Forest Analysis

Brian presented conclusions from his working forests project that looked at young growth on all ownerships across SE AK, building on previous work that mainly dealt with just USFS ownership. Brian is now working on the old-growth piece. The all-lands young growth project included big categories like Native Corporations holdings as well as medium and small lands such as municipalities, etc. Slides from his presentation and results from the project will be posted on the TTC website. One of the results from the study is that operability on different ownerships is significantly reduced by the fall down that results from protection of fish streams, karst, etc. Inoperability on Federal lands is approximately 41%; on Native Corporations approximately 30%; and on State lands approximately 9%.

Looking ahead:

- 2025 – 2029 = Foundation Building. There will be limited supply in eight priority basins
- 2030 will be the first year where we start seeing a lot of merchantable young growth being ready
- 2030-20240 – Expansion Phase = 15X increase in harvest potential
- 2041 – Sustained Supply (with 55% supply estimated from Native Corporations)

Q&A and Discussion, Key Points:

- There was a concern about logging young growth stands too early when they are at their highest growth potential – we could dramatically increase allowable harvest if we were to delay the start of young growth focused harvest by 10 to 15 years.
- Analysis of available timber supply assumes that every owner chooses to harvest the available volume. Effective partnerships will be required to coordinate the harvest to maximize the available volumes.
- Among the biggest challenges to future supply are the operability gaps between ownerships, carbon market competition, complex partnerships, and the lack of near-term supply. Growth model uncertainty has a much smaller impact than other concerns – such as operability reductions.
- Changing silvicultural prescriptions can drive up costs significantly.

- Another consideration is that some of the harvests on older areas were on very steep ground which raises the questions about whether those acres will be available for harvest in the future and about the potential of downhill yarding in young growth.
- Scenery has always been a large impact factor.
- The USFS is interested in combining the temporal data with information about location of future mills and their supply needs.
- Combining road layers with Brian's study will help us understand the economics of harvest. We can open an old road cheaper than we can start a new road.
- There is a need for an overall economic analysis of the Tongass economy and the complexities that need to be addressed for long-term sustainability.

USFS Update - Monique Nelson and Barbara Miranda

The government shutdown has had huge impacts, impacting 280 employees. The Tongass has lost 1/3 of its staff and are waiting news about a USDA reorganization. There is nothing new to report except there will be changes in the number of regional offices (we don't know yet what will happen with State and Private, Research, etc.). We expect to learn more from a DC meeting in November.

Active forest management is in the spotlight. A nationwide strategy has been released, and regions are followed up. Internal documents which are still draft include a 5-year timber sale schedule. In the last five years, there has not been a lot of work in this area. We are working hard to get volume out to meet community needs. Monique is enthusiastic about sales that are developing. These include Thorne Bay Basin – young growth in small batches as the timber becomes ready; picking up on the South Revella sale that was put on hold during the previous administration (about 8M board feet of old growth; returning to the Staney Basin (some early young growth might be available along with a few old growth stands), etc. The preference is to have both old and young growth. This is at the EIS stage – no timeline available); looking at Wrangel Island for next season and looking for more old growth sales; there are additional outyear plans in development.

The Chief has prioritized Alaska for a Shared Stewardship Agreement with the State. This is not a land exchange; it is just using the respective strengths of each to improve efficiency. NEPA will still be required. Being able to use past analysis is going to be a good improvement – we are hoping EIS timeframes can move from two years to one year.

Recreation and tourism have been impacted by the government shutdown, but the Discovery Center and Mendenhall Glacier facilities were kept open to finish out the cruise ship season. \$14M have been budgeted for cabin construction and maintenance, and improvements for Mendenhall Visitor Center.

Rulemaking is underway regarding the Roadless Rule. Tribal notification occurred in July, and the Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in August. The comment period with Tribes will continue until Nov 24. Public comment has closed. A proposed rule is anticipated to be released in mid 2026 in the Federal

Register and a final decision is expected at the end of December 2026. There is an emphasis on shifting to local policy management for forest health and wildfire.

Sealaska Update – Jason Gubatayao

Sealaska is interested in developing salmon habitat credits, like carbon credits, and is looking at commercial tourism and hydro expansion projects. Roads are another focal area – prioritizing roads for maintenance rather than closing roads. There is a 10-year plan for all roads. We are also prioritizing cultural road inventories, starting in areas with high levels of Red Cedar (we have covered 700 acres to date.) There is talk about sharing harvest costs across landowners. Sealaska is in the process of evaluating its young growth but have no interest in reinstating past logging practices (i.e., large clear cuts). One of the reasons logging was shut down was due to shareholder interest – we do not see young growth being logged in the near future. There might be interest in smaller cuts in the future but that is under evaluation. Local use versus export is key. We are still doing precommercial thinning on about 2000 to 3000 acres a year with the goal of accelerating old growth. We want to push the boundaries on current best management practices, e.g., looking at modifications that could enhance growth.

State DOF Update - Jeremy Douse

Staffing - Mike Cooney has been hired on a temporary basis, but they are trying to make the position permanent. Ashley List has been named as the Deputy Director for Forestry. Steve Conley has retired; we are interviewing for his replacement.

Volume - We are trying to meet industry volume needs by steadily ramping up – we produced 22M board feet in SE AK last year but are struggling to finding young foresters to get timber out. We have about 46,000 acres of State Forest, and some settlement lands, but there are a lot of competing needs in addition to timber, e.g., for access, cultural uses, and wildlife habitat.

Lumber Grading Program – To date the program has certified 216 people and we are looking to lean into milling operations for home construction. A wood utilization team is working on a website, a branding campaign around Alaskan grown products, and an annual workshop teaming with the wood energy workshop.

Shared stewardship with the USFS – The Governor’s office is reviewing the language in the master agreement that provides direction to the challenge cost share agreement and intent language for Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) GNA is being renewed under a new 10-year master agreement (should be ready early next year) and the USFS is revising the template for SPAS – no new agreements will be finalized until this is done. The current Kosciusko Island agreement is set to expire next year. An effectiveness assessment of the Kosciusko project compiled recommendations for future GNA implementation. Other anticipated GNA agreements in the works include Thomas Bay for up to 10M board feet of young growth and trying to extend the work on Gravina.

Administrative order AO360 - requires a reduction in regulations by 25%. All regulations are therefore under review – this is a priority moving forward. We are trying to figure out how to meet the intent of the Forest Resources Protection Act (FRPA), which protects watersheds and land, while not creating too big of a lift for industry, and we are examining regulations designed during the pulp mill era to see if they still meet their original intent. A working group has been established to assist, and science and a technical group will provide additional review.

Federal legislation - The Fix our Forests Act, which mostly involves restoration in western forests impacted by fire, is also being closely watched. Legislation coming out of Utah suggests moving the Forest Service to the Department of Interior.

Landowners group – Mike Cooney would like to know if there is still interest in continuing the group – contact Mike with any thoughts. There may be an opportunity to hire a facilitator.

Staff Capacity - One of the challenges with making timber available is getting NEPA completed – we are struggling to find qualified entry level candidates to help with the work. We are convening a working group to help set up a technician certification program. It was suggested that Native Corporations could be a source for potential certificate program candidates. Also, look at SSP to partner with this effort.

Cape Fox Update – Paul Slenkamp

Cape Fox owns about 126 miles of roads that are connected to the Ketchikan road system. The roads, which were built in the 70s and 80s in conjunction with logging operations of the time), are functional but not necessarily safe. Bridges are past their useful life. We are working on an inventory system for high value roads for future tourism opportunities. The Shelter Cove road has opened access for recreation. We will be adding a bridge and parking lot to improve access to the George Inlet cannery for tourism purposes. We are also actively engaged in pre-commercial thinning and are entered into a 40-year carbon project working with Terre Verde. Workforce development is a priority for shareholder training. We are working with the southeast watershed commission to identify habitat improvement opportunities on Cape Fox land, and we are expecting the lands bill in congress, which will provide final approval for land transfers, to help with development of the Mahoney Creek hydro project.

Shant Seet Update – Quinn Aboudara

Shan Seet has an extensive history of timber harvest on POW, but there is no viable timber to manage at this point. We have completed all the previously planned pre-commercial thinning and are now looking at how to use the land base for tourism, business, economic development, local housing initiatives, and to meet local timber needs in the future. We are working with Terre Verde and Sealaska to develop a training program for young foresters and are coordinating with tribes to train crews throughout the region in sayer certification, instream restoration, and young growth inventory assessments. We want local individuals to be highly qualified. We are having conversation with the State to look at salvage and potential harvest, signed a contract with the USFS last week for microcells for young growth to support local lumber needs and are Investing in a small diameter mill. The Shan Seet natural resources

department has been mothballed since 2013, so we are now focusing on restarting the program and planning for the future. We are active in the Indigenous Forest Partnership.

Huna Totem Update - Brian Kleinhenz

Huna Totem has a booming tourism business utilizing the Hoonah land base and its road system. Its old growth is invested in carbon credits. They are also evaluating if there is young growth potential in carbon credits. They are replacing bridges, building trails, and precommercial thinning is complete but they are trying to keep roads open. There will be second growth in the coming years, and they are considering young growth harvest, but only if it doesn't interfere with tourism. Elsewhere they are developing a hydro project in Kaasan and are looking for opportunities and partnerships to increase revenue. The Long Island Trust has an active tree farm that is in the middle of nowhere and relatively small. The vast majority of its old growth has been logged, but it is close to providing a steady second growth supply.

Ketchikan Borough Update - Austin Otis

The borough is partnering with Alcan on targeted harvest in very thoughtful locations to provide timber for housing. This also enables roads to be built that otherwise would not be constructed because the borough does not have the needed funding or capacity. The borough has looked at acquiring more land from the USFS, but this has not been successful.

Tongass Citizen's Alternative Panel

Introduction – Bob Christensen: The quest for stability is driving the effort to develop a citizen's alternative to the Forest Plan. It was born out of frustration with the politicalization of previous efforts and how many of those conclusions and recommendations were wiped out by a press release from the Federal government. The citizen's alternative is an example of an operating democracy at the local level – people who live in the region developing an agreed upon management plan, maintaining healthy relationships, and assuming more ownership of our lands. This is what needs to be done for stability to be successful. There needs to be a diverse representation within the group putting together recommendations if this is going to move forward. The draft being discussed at this meeting is a starting point for the conversation. The goal is to refine it through more representation, collaboration and consensus. The panelists today will discuss different stakeholder insights about current conditions on the forest as they pertain to different plan components, and what needs to change for the hoped-for future.

Forest Planning - Ray Vaughan: Ray is an expert on the 2012 forest planning role, an attorney from Alabama who has been involved in planning on national forests since 1984 in the South and West. In the face of massive restoration needs in the South, where citizens desired scientifically valid restoration, he helped with the development of a new forest plan that reflected what people wanted and that addressed Tribal cultural needs. Since then, there has not been one lawsuit on that plan. There have been several citizens alternatives focusing on finding zones of agreement, not necessarily on trying to reach agreement on entire forest plans. Custer Galatin National Forests is a good example – not too complex. Any citizens alternative planning effort needs to decide what it wants and how detailed it

should be. Citizen's alternatives for the roadless rule have survived political changes. Ray's company is prepared to assist this effort if requested.

The Tongass Forest Plan Revision effort – Monique Nelson and Barb Miranda: The Forest Plan assessment is complete and out for comment. The notice of intent for the EIS – which includes six items that need to change - should be released in November. That will kick off the planning phase. We are already working on an internal draft plan targeting for release in March, followed by public engagement in April. The final draft EIS is scheduled for release in May of 2027. We have invited cooperating agencies to participate and reinvited tribes starting in November. There will be a tribal workshop in January. We need information on any alternatives by the end of January to be included in the April public engagement process. There will still be potential opportunities for engagement later if this is not done by January but sooner would be better.

Management Areas – Bob Christensen: The proposed management areas in the draft citizens' alternative are simplified to just four areas – Wilderness, Community Forest, Roadless, and Remote Roadless. Community Forests are defined as having a road where you can drive from a community to a watershed. A Community Forest can supply forest needs to a community on a road system. Historically, timber development was separated from communities for conservation needs. That clashed with community needs for products from the forest. This Community Forest concept acknowledges the needs for communities to get resources from the forest for daily living.

Timber component - Brian Kleinhenz: The current timber availability situation is that there is no supply for the existing industry. For the last six years the industry has relied on supply from Mental Health Trust lands. The industry is at the smallest size it can be before it implodes. Businesses are all integrated - if you lose one business there will be a cascade of failure. The State is limited on supply and most of the Alaska Native Corporations are not interested in large scale timber supply agreements. The year 2030 will be the beginning of sustainable 2nd growth availability. The next five years supply will have to be mostly old growth off Federal lands. The desired future condition is reliable supply, and good logistics infrastructure (roads, barging, marine access etc.) that is expensive to build and/or maintain – but necessary (most current infrastructure is deteriorating or unusable). We must stop reducing the functional land base available for harvest if we want to see a continued timber industry in Alaska. Public and private entities will have to change to support the timber industry.

Comments:

- Need to be more specific on what is a steady supply, and it must include old growth. (pointing to the need for an analysis of what sustainable, economics are for the Tongass)
- Define the working forest landscape with a clear projection of what we have as a supply.
- Need to recognize that these resources are finite.
- We need to stretch out the markets as long as we can.
- Small mills currently depend mostly on old growth – but the scale is small. The current availability of young growth (to support small mills) is limited to 5-10mm board feet under

contract. It is a lot of energy to chase the small amounts available. The small mills are really not interested in 2nd growth.

- Question - Has there been an inventory of the status of access? This is a work product that needs to be developed. We need to understand what road development is needed for forest health that will support economic development, etc. in the future.
- There are conditions related to cost due to the China ban that will make new entry into business challenging. We must be realistic about the export situation.

Sitka Trail Works and the Tongass Recreation Partnership - Emily Pound: The Partnership, which includes municipal governments, has volunteer trails programs and programs, and a partnership with the alternative high school. Recreation is important because it supports healthy living. Tourism, which is commercial recreation, is facing significant challenges, including declining youth involvement, a declining workforce, systemic mental health issues, lack of infrastructure and the lack of resources (including money, technical skills, and tools to maintain infrastructure). The USFS should be doing more maintenance, e.g., on bridges and trails. What needs to change – tourism and recreation need to be part of the strategy; and we need more resources to maintain infrastructure. Our draft includes six mechanisms to drive change – use of good data, pathways, vision, building and maintaining more trails, and a cultural shift.

Conservation and Ecological Integrity - Natalie Dawson: Core issues needing to be addressed are aquatic ecosystem integrity and salmon. Fishing is an economic driver. Climate change is the primary stressor and there are ongoing threats, e.g., despite increasing replacement of fish passages, 30% of newly installed culverts are failing to meet objectives. The draft alternative plan direction includes protection of high value salmon habitat, scientifically based buffers, priority restoration, accelerating aquatic restoration, strengthening protection standards, proactive management for invasive species and mitigation of industry impacts. We would like to see language around watershed health to address localized decline, but the current draft has too much detail – talk to Natalie if you have ideas for simplifying those recommendations.

Regarding roads, the focus is on trying to reverse aquatic decline by improving monitoring, improving low functioning indicators, enhancing vegetation management, and sustaining road and trail improvements.

Tribal Priorities – Anthony Mallot and Arielle Halpern: Tribes speak for themselves. The starting point is to know the 14,000-year history of tribal stewardship. We had abundance before the Tongass was formed. Tribes have experienced loss since the national park system was established. They have been forced to move from their lands. This loss is the starting point of each conversation.

Cultural sites have remained intentionally unknown as way to protect them from being mismanaged. Going forward, we need data systems and confidential systems for better utilization of sacred sites, and we need cultural use products from the forest in addition to timber – totem trees, weaving, medicines, etc.

Tribes have lost the stewardship role they have had for 14,000 years - we need to bring Tribal stewardship back to the table. Some Tribes have been burned as cooperating agencies. They want another vehicle towards stewardship. All Tribes would like to get to co-management; it is not to be feared. Perhaps we can we import some of the co-management pathways the Park Service has adopted. Utilization is part of Tribal culture, but we want co-management and trust.

Harvesting – Tribes and industry are saying the same thing – stop the pendulum swing. In the past industry has not been good working with Tribes. Attempts have not been consistent - this has created a big divide. Tribes do not want further old growth harvest at previous industry scale. The region needs the timber industry, but there is not infinite old growth. Who among us has observed the regeneration of old growth characteristics? We have been talking supply and demand, availability, etc. – but we do not have the information that says that old growth can return, and we don't have a realistic strategy to get back to old growth. We don't know if it is possible, especially with climate change, etc. We have never grown old growth from a clear cut. Maybe old growth is achievable from a stand structure standpoint, but what about from an ecological function standpoint, and what is the timeframe to achieve ecologically functional old growth?

Climate change is not political to tribes. We want better data and to be involved in data collection – to build capacity for the Tribe and improve relationships with USFS.

Workforce development is a positive. For example, we have an agreement with the USFS to run the Mendenhall Visitor Center.

This is our homeland. We must work together to develop a holistic plan, with representation for all impacted. It must include things like deer and salmon that are most important for our food security and sovereignty. Also, there are people who should be here who are not here. Where are the other industry panels – visitor industry, seafood, government, etc. We need to make this a conversation beyond timber.

Break out Reports and Discussion

Each break out group reported key insights and the level of interest that was expressed in their group for continuing to develop the Citizen's Alternative.

Key insights across the breakout groups:

- Pendulum swings at the national level are inevitable, but we want, and think is possible, is to slow and reduce the size of the swings here in Southeast Alaska.
- There is a desire to resist the polarization that accompanies the pendulum swings - to find as much common ground locally as we can, to "become boringly normal" by working together toward a sustainable and prosperous future – because this is OUR home. We need to get better at explaining how what we provide is in the National interest – to tell that story.

- We want a middle ground centered on the health of our communities, the long-term sustainability and health of our forested landscape, and the economic and cultural values that are part of the fabric of this region (healthy tribes = healthy communities, healthy communities = healthy tribes).
- There is broad concurrence on workforce development - providing a future for our kids.
- There is a lot of interest in a long term, sustainable young-growth economy. While there are some outliers who oppose essentially all timber extraction, the sentiment within this group is that some level is necessary and that we need to create a framework for sustainable management over time that pairs extraction with helping to support restoration. There is a need to shift/reposition a bit because not everyone will be happy.
- There are and will be challenges, e.g., the debate over old growth management. The trend seems to be agreement around an old growth dominated forest in the distant future, but there are very different ideas about how to get there.
- Another challenge is the tension that exists in the recreation/tourism sphere between large (e.g., cruise ship) and small operators. They impact communities differently and have both positive and negative effects. There are many layers to the industry, e.g., winter versus summer and what happens to the local workforce when businesses leave in the winter. We need to create a framework that mitigates the negative impacts on our communities – which will require data about where tourists are going as well as more funding and innovative ways to maintain recreational infrastructure. And we should look at appropriate tools and technology to meet the management needs of our wilderness areas.
- This coalition (the TTC) can be leveraged to help make progress. To be more effective it needs to:
 - Bring in more voices, expand participation, get the word out about what we are doing, and engage more people
 - Serve as a venue for creative, innovative thinking about new approaches (e.g. develop a totem economy, look at emerging technologies, think differently about management paradigms, etc.)
 - Offer more opportunities for facilitated discussion, with good information available, to narrow differences and develop balanced solutions
 - Think long term (600 years rather than just four)

Level of interest to continue to work on the Citizens Alternative

There was general agreement that it is worth continuing to invest in developing a citizen's alternative (or whatever it ends up being called), along with recognition that failure is a possibility – especially given the short timeframe. (It was also noted that failure can be a strength if it offers lessons and if there is willingness to learn the lessons and persevere). We should do as much as we can with the time we have (and try to push the timeframe to accommodate our input) and build into the process ways to influence decisions in the future. The goal is to get ideas adopted.

Next Steps

- Bob Christensen, Robert Venables and the TTC Advisory Team will help coordinate follow up steps for developing a citizen's alternative.
- There needs to be a body of work of around economic planning/economic feasibility for niche manufacturing and the durability of the market – building on Brian's work.
- Continue working on the integrated forestry campus idea. With the right scope of work, such a campus might be eligible for disaster recovery financial assistance. The concept includes wood stockpiles, space for wood utilization, a warehouse facility, a multi-use facility, kilns, space for expansion to accommodate drying, places to create house designs and jigs to cut the wood, a technical school, cultural wood inventory storage, and access to shared equipment.
- The draft TTC guiding principles, organizational framework and meeting protocols will be further refined by the Advisory Team and circulated to the membership for feedback.

Final Reflections

- Appreciate the open and honest conversation, and all the ideas about how to move forward with a broad coalition
- Appreciate the opportunity to be here. Wants to continue the conversations.
- Appreciate the guidance to come to this conversation with an open mind; set aside positions.
- Glad SEC is providing TTC with a home. The USFS wants to continue supporting the process and to continue providing financial assistance.
- Appreciate the good faith discussions.
- Kudos and thanks to Robert for facilitating the meeting. Great collaboration and ideas.
- Forest health was not talked about much, but concerns remain about whether the forest is as healthy as we think/hope it is. How bad is the Spruce Bark Beetle outbreak? Large stands of hemlock are dead because of the outbreak and there are 700,000 acres of dead yellow cedar.
- Ultimately, we all want an economy with forest products from healthy forests that is home to healthy habitat.