



# Tongass Transition Collaborative

## Key Points and Options for Future Involvement

*February 23, 2018 Meeting with Senator Murkowski and Forest Service Chief Tooke*

When the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) was first convened in 2014, the US Department of Agriculture charged them with a narrow focus on how to achieve the transition to young growth management in a way that is economically feasible for the timber industry and considered other resource values on the Tongass National Forest. They submitted a package of consensus recommendations in December 2015, which included input to be considered as part of the Tongass Land & Resource Management Plan Amendment, as well as significant recommendations regarding implementation of the Plan (available via this [link](#)). Since that time, the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC) has helped drive significant achievements in implementation of the transition; however, there have also been several missed opportunities, highlighting the need for an adaptive management approach on the Forest. Below are several of these achievements and opportunities for adaptation as discussed during the February 23, 2018 meeting with US Senator Lisa Murkowski and US Forest Service (USFS) Chief Tony Tooke.

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### Implementing the TAC Recommendations

#### Tools for Successful Implementation: Resource Sharing and Partnerships

1. **The Challenge Cost-Share Agreement** represents a successful merger of USFS and State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources workforce and cultures, resulting in a true partnership between the agencies. This led to completion of several thousand acres of young growth and old growth stand-level inventory, bolstering of the Tongass growth project model, and training and development of a local workforce for these activities and future job opportunities. (Information about these efforts can be accessed via the [Tongass Young Growth Story Map](#).)
2. **The Prince of Wales Landscape-Level Assessment** involved collaboration among forest users and community members on Prince of Wales Island to identify a suite of projects across resources and forest uses, including young growth and old growth timber sales, visitor industry investments, restoration efforts, and subsistence uses. (The final list of proposed projects and input can be accessed via the [Prince of Wales Landscape Assessment Team page](#).)

3. **The use of Good Neighbor Authority** led to implementation of a successful young growth timber sale on Kosciusko Island, an area that represents a huge opportunity for young growth rotational forestry through partnerships with adjacent landowners.

#### **Missed Opportunities: Stakeholder Engagement for Integrated Forest Management**

1. **By involving industry upfront and early-on** in sale preparation and planning, it increases the probability of an economically viable sale, and the potential for additional revenue that can be applied to habitat improvements and restoration, ultimately allowing for certainty for all involved.
2. **Taking an integrated resource management approach** can help to identify “win-win” opportunities, dubbed by the TAC as “co-intent.” For example, there were missed opportunities in the Kosciusko timber sale to integrate salmon habitat restoration; similarly, the Vallenar Bay sale could have used co-intent management approaches to harvest timber in non-development land use designations and replant species in the most productive areas to simultaneously improve habitat conditions and increase current and future harvest volume.

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### **Adaptive Management – Learning from the Data**

With additional information available through Plan implementation and inventory efforts, the TTC recognized a significant need for adaptive management. The USFS developed the 2012 National Forest Planning Rule with a focus on adaptive management; however, it is unclear what options exist for such adaptation. The TTC offers the following suggestions for consideration.

1. **Correct errors within the Plan.** TTC members and USFS staff identified an error within the Tongass Management Plan and are seeking options to amend it without the need for a full Plan Amendment or Revision; therefore, without precluding progress on current project development efforts. Specifically, this error refers to the Standard that restricts harvest on areas of moderate vulnerability karst, which states, “on lands identified as moderate vulnerability karst...the maximum size of any created opening for commercial timber harvest must not exceed 10 acres with a maximum removal of 35 percent of the acres of the original harvested stand” ([Tongass Land and Resources Management Plan](#), pg. 5-6). These lands represent a significant opportunity for young growth timber harvest, and therefore, it was not the TAC’s intent to include this Standard.
2. **Continue to collaborate to find “win-win” solutions.** TTC members emphasized the need to continue to build on common ground that was established through the TAC process, acknowledging that a shared commitment to reach across the table was the number one value of the TAC and should be continued.

USFS leadership agreed that working with partners with common values is the only way to get things done; however, there are still barriers. Since there is not a formal process (i.e., federal advisory committee act) to receive assistance from the TTC, members urged the agency to ensure that the group's input is being received and incorporated into decision making. They also emphasized the importance of continued partnerships with adjacent landowners, including continued meetings of the All Lands Group to improve efficiencies in timber sale and project implementation; the use of Good Neighbor Authority to overcome current obstacles in sale planning and preparation (e.g., appraisals, contracting, layout, etc.); and future iterations of the Challenge Cost Share Agreement to ensure that benefits of Tongass investments reach Southeast Alaska communities.

3. **Identify the best opportunities for timber resources.** The TAC agreed from the start that logging will, and needs to, continue. To achieve the transition to young growth, they emphasized the TAC concept of “no net loss” – in other words, if young growth acres are removed from harvest, additional old growth acres must be used to replace these areas. However, the TAC did not identify location(s) where these replacement acres nor other bridge timber should come from. A collaborative approach to identifying where old growth timber harvest could allow for joint decisions about the best uses of the land. In addition, the group emphasized, when pursuing a potential timber sale, it is necessary to engage the timber industry early and often to gain a clear understanding of market dynamics and opportunities associated with sale layout and planning. The group also reiterated the importance of finding opportunities for value-added processing of timber as a means of economic development for Southeast Alaska communities.
4. **Give authority to District Rangers to adapt as science becomes available.** A core TAC recommendation was culture change within the USFS – to focus on what *can* be done and innovate based on that perspective. With new data available, it will be important to reassess what is possible, and find new opportunities based on this information. However, this will only be possible if line officers have the authority to make decisions, implement new approaches, and adapt to changing conditions. Staff need clear direction from national and regional levels regarding high-level guidance about what is/is not allowed or possible, and to be given the discretion and flexibility to approach projects within the given sideboards.
5. **Base decisions on good science, complete information, and reliable data.** Now that inventory data is available, it is important to maintain up-to-date information to inform future policy decisions and planning efforts. This involves the need to correct the error in the sustainable supply number listed within the Plan, specifically with regards to contributions from Native Corporations and villages. This correct number can then serve as a target for timber planning efforts. Having correct information can ultimately lead to the ability to use the best available science to ensure that timber (and all other) resources are available for future generations.

## Additional Resources

**Tongass Advisory Committee website:** [www.merid.org/tongassadvisorycommittee](http://www.merid.org/tongassadvisorycommittee)

**Tongass Transition Collaborative website:** [www.merid.org/tongassimplementation](http://www.merid.org/tongassimplementation)

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