



# Tongass Transition Collaborative Working Session Summary

December 15, 2017, Ketchikan, Alaska

On December 15, 2017, members of the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC) met with representatives from the United States Forest Service (USFS) in Ketchikan, Alaska. (See Appendix A for a list of meeting participants.) The objectives of the meeting were to: reflect on outcomes from the previous day's TTC meeting with leadership; identify tactical opportunities to address on-the-ground challenges identified; and identify priorities for continued progress toward achieving Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) recommendations.

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## Implementation of the Plan Amendment

Participants discussed the challenges of implementing some portions of the Plan Amendment. During the story mapping overview in the meeting with leadership, USFS staff outlined an issue with unclear language in the Plan Amendment. The Amendment states that for non-development land use designations (beach buffers, riparian management areas outside of TTRA buffers, and old growth reserves), and any areas with 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." Participants discussed several ways in which this could be interpreted when any of the three non-development LUDs and/or moderate vulnerability karst are identified within the original stand boundaries. These interpretations include the following (among others):

- Only 35% of the *entire stand* can be harvested.
- Only 35% of the area within the non-development LUD or moderate vulnerability karst areas can be harvested, while 100% of the remaining stand can be harvested (within timber development LUD).
- Only 35% of the total stand can be harvested, and that total amount can fall within the timber development LUD or non-development LUD/moderate vulnerability karst area.

Through analysis of the inventory data, USFS staff identified non-development LUDs and/or moderate vulnerability karst within almost every original stand boundary. Therefore, if USFS staff interpret the language to mean that only 35% of the entire stand can be harvested, it would severely limit the options for economically viable timber harvest (calculated to be as much as 75% fall-down of available acres).

Through significant deliberation, the group came to the conclusion that the original intent of the language regarding 35% harvest should be interpreted as: 35% of the non-development LUDs found within the stand boundary can be harvested, as well as 100% of the remaining stand within timber development LUD available for harvest, with the exception of the 0-200-foot beach buffer and TTRA buffers for streams, which cannot be harvested. To make a change within the Plan that clarifies or defines direction in the Plan, it needs to be clarified through a management intent, which does not necessitate a Plan Amendment.

Participants were concerned, however, with applying this language to areas with moderate vulnerability karst, which is prevalent in the Tongass, and would result in significant reductions in available timber harvest. The group agreed that it was not the original intent of the TAC to include moderate vulnerability karst in the Plan Amendment as an area subject to the 35% guideline. Instead, they referenced the standards and guidelines in the Plan that are specific to karst protections. An issue with using different applications for non-development LUDs and moderate vulnerability karst is that the interpretation of one cannot be changed while the meaning of the others stays the same. Therefore, in order to significantly change or remove the language in the Plan regarding moderate vulnerability karst (as opposed to simply providing clarification for the intended meaning, as described above), the Forest Service would need to undergo another Plan Amendment, which could take significant time.

The group determined that the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Assessment (POWLLA) could be used as a way to amend the Forest Plan, and, as a first step, could include the 35% application to moderate vulnerability karst in one alternative, while removing the restriction in another alternative in order to model the effects of each approach. USFS staff requested that the group then reconvene to discuss the results of the analyses, and submit a written statement reflecting the group's preference for the final approach for Prince of Wales projects. In addition, USFS staff agreed to reach out to Regional Forester Pendleton and Forest Supervisor Stewart to gain clarity regarding whether a project-specific Amendment would apply to the full Tongass or just the area for that specific project.

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## Workforce Development

Stephen Suewing, Workforce Development Catalyst for the Alaska Division of Economic Development, provided an overview of the workforce development objectives for 2018, all of which focus on improved coordination across programs and focus areas:

- Participation of at least twelve participants, six youth in supporting roles, and two host communities for 2018 resource academies;
- Focus on stream surveying for 2018 resource academies, targeting employment for stream inventory jobs in coming season;
- Identification of internships with industry partners, conservation partners, and others;
- Development of an education coordinator position for workforce development efforts; and
- Youth exposure to industry opportunities through industry partner engagement and events.

Participants had a number of suggestions to ensure the continued development of a consistent, young workforce in Southeast Alaska. They suggested the following activities:

- Track job retention of resource academy graduates.
- Communicate job openings to academy students/graduates and provide information about graduates to entities searching for new hires.
- Ensure that future trainings teach students how to maintain a job (recognizing that additional training can be provided upon hire).
- Identify project partners and opportunities to hand off the workforce training programs to other organizations to maintain the success of these programs after CCS funding expires.
- Consider other topic areas for future trainings, such as a restoration academy, other forest academies in different areas of Southeast Alaska, GIS training and data analysis, and wildfire certification.

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## Challenge Cost Share 2.0

During this session, the group discussed the future of CCS and what programs and activities should be prioritized, should another round of funding be issued. Ideas included:

- Create a coordinator position for the All Lands Group to ensure continued collaboration and communication between landowners, and development of a joint timber schedule.
- Continue investment in workforce development, including training for old growth cruisers targeted at current employees and those that have completed the forestry academy.
- Pursue additional on-the-ground inventory and analyses of inventory data to be used for future sale preparation. Specific suggestions included hiring a data manager to assist with data analysis and quality control, additional ground truthing for LiDAR verification, and old-growth plot inventories.

- Implement the MOU with AFA, with particular focus on industry input into old growth sales.
  - Due to the uncertainty of future grant funds through the National Forest Foundation, consider funding future work of the TTC.
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## National Legislative Decisions Impacting the Tongass

The group discussed the potential implications of the Senate Appropriations Bill and Congressional review of the Forest Plan Amendment, as it relates to the work of the TTC. Many in the group expressed concern that a repeal of the Amendment and/or halting the transition would result in a significant setback in the progress of the collaborative work of implementing the TAC recommendations. The group agreed to develop and circulate a media release emphasizing the importance of a local, collaborative approach to Tongass National Forest planning and management. A copy of the statement can be found [here](#).

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## Next Steps and Action Items

1. The group will plan to meet in spring of 2018 (April/May) to provide feedback on the draft POWLLA and socioeconomic monitoring baseline study plan.
2. TTC members will provide feedback on the proposed infrastructure priorities list put forward by the All Lands Group and circulated by Meridian.
3. Meridian will produce a summary for both meetings, share available audio recordings with participants upon request, and prepare a briefing paper on lessons learned from the CCS that were discussed in the meeting.
4. The TTC will develop and publish a press release commenting on the importance of collaboration in the face of political uncertainty on the Tongass.
5. USFS staff will determine the best approach to incorporating clarification for the 35% harvest rule as it applies to non-development LUDs and/or moderate vulnerability karst.

## **Appendix A: TTC Working Session Participant List**

### **In-Person Participants and Staff**

- **Matt Anderson**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Jason Anderson**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Les Cronk**, Southeast Stevedoring Corp.
- **Jessica Davila**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Sophie Gutterman**, Meridian Institute
- **Susan Howle**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Brian Kleinhenz**, Terra Verde, Inc.
- **Chris Maisch**, Alaska Division of Forestry
- **Diana Portner**, Meridian Institute
- **Conor Reynolds**, The Nature Conservancy
- **Sheila Spores**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Andrew Thoms**, Sitka Conservation Society
- **Cathy Tighe**, USFS, Tongass National Forest
- **Austin Williams**, Trout Unlimited

### **Teleconference and Video-Teleconference Participants**

- **Carol Rushmore**, City and Borough of Wrangell
- **Stephen Suewing**, Alaska Division of Economic Development