



Tongass Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

November 19-21, 2014

Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Tribal Community House, Sitka, AK

The Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) held its fourth meeting at the Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Community House in Sitka to continue discussions regarding a transition from primarily old growth to predominantly young growth timber harvest on the Tongass National Forest (the Forest). During the three-day meeting, from November 19-21, the Committee made significant progress discussing key issues that may inform the development of an alternative for the Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) Amendment. They also had the opportunity to discuss issues regarding transitioning to young growth with Under Secretary Robert Bonnie.

The meeting agenda is available online, [here](#). The following summary provides a description of each topic discussed and the resolution (where applicable). See Appendix A for a meeting participant list (including TAC members, staff, and members of the public who attended).

Welcoming Remarks and Updates

Michael Baines, Tribal Chairman for the Sitka Tribe, welcomed the TAC to Sitka on behalf of the Tribal Council and over 4000 past and present tribal members. He expressed hope that the Committee show a sense of energy and enthusiasm throughout the process, and that they consider the outlook for Southeast Alaska in developing recommendations for the transition to primarily young growth timber harvest. He mentioned concerns about stagnant economies, high unemployment rates, and the increasingly high cost of living in Southeast Alaska, due in part to high electricity rates. He encouraged the Forest to view local tribes as good partners, particularly for ensuring protection of traditional resources in the area. With seed money to assist with projects, there are a lot of opportunities for tribes to contribute.

Committee Updates

The TAC discussed the process and timeline for providing recommendations. While they recognized that a lot of work had been completed to date, especially in describing the findings that will underpin recommendations, they anticipate it will be at least January before they have a substantial set of recommendations drafted.

Plan Amendment Updates

Jason Anderson, the TAC's Designated Federal Official (DFO), told the TAC that Sue Howle, team lead for the Plan Amendment Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will be refining the Purpose and Need Statement language for the Amendment. He encouraged the TAC to

forward their draft Purpose and Need language so it can be considered in a timely way by the IDT. Jason also noted that the IDT is continuing to evolve concepts and components to include in the draft alternatives for the Plan Amendment, and that the concept of an Overlay Land Use Designation (LUD) is currently no longer being considered (although it had previously been mentioned as a concept that the Forest was interested in, and that the TAC might consider).

Updates Regarding the Tongass Transition

Karen Hardigg, Transition Framework Coordinator for the Forest, provided a brief overview of actions to date for the broader transition strategy. She stressed that the Plan Amendment is only one piece of the transition strategy, and other on-the-ground activities and implementation are also important. While the focus of the TAC is explicitly on timber management, she clarified that the intent of the transition is to move beyond old growth timber harvest through a variety of strategies. Karen's PowerPoint presentation is available [here](#). Below is an overview of some initiatives that have been implemented in recent years.

- **Interagency Leadership Team:** coordination between sister agencies to leverage resources to create economic opportunities.
- **National Strike Force Initiative:** leverages resources and aligns programs for communities with persistent poverty through USDA Rural Development and Farm Service Agency
- **Economic Cluster Initiative:** partnership with the Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC) to link business with government to create a competitive advantage in certain sectors. Examples of clusters include research and development, and visitor services.
- **Innovation Summits:** led annually by JEDC to provide platform for communities, government and business to identify ways to create economic development opportunities.
- **Community Capacity Land Stewardship Grant Program:** partnership with the National Forest Foundation that has provided over \$400,000 to small watershed restoration and collaborative capacity-building projects. Examples of projects include the Sitka Conservation Society youth woodworking program, and the Kake and Hoonah Community Forests.
- **Tongass Collaborative Stewardship Group:** partnership that allows opportunities to share lessons, investments, and strategies for implementing on-the-ground stewardship and restoration work. Other partnership examples include the Staney Community Forest Group, Kennel Creek and Hoonah Native Lands Partnership, and the Kake Community Forest.
- **Stewardship Contracts:** flexible tool for timber sales that allow for longer contracts, trade of goods for services, and retained receipts for reinvestment in other projects on the Forest. These sales are based not solely on price, but on the benefits to the

government. Examples of stewardship contracts include Tonka, Heceta, Frenchie, and Big Thorne.

- ***Timber Sales and Inventory:*** several investments by the Forest to improve data/inventory, research (e.g., Tongass Wide Young Growth Study), planning, sales, and implementation strategies for young growth. Examples of young growth sales include Winter Harbor, Heceta, Dargon Point, and Kosciusko. Sales also include old growth bridge timber sales, such as Tonka, Big Thorne, Wrangell (upcoming), and Saddle Lakes (upcoming).
- ***Tongass Integrated Plan (TIP):*** coordination across programmatic areas to create a more integrated and efficient process for planning and resource allocation across the Forest. This approach to landscape-level planning allows the Forest to be more strategic about leveraging funding with partners, such as coordinating road closures with potential future timber and restoration project needs. While discrete projects will still occur for each programmatic area, the projects listed in the TIP are considered high priority for the Forest.¹
- ***Draft 5-year Timber Schedule:*** schedule of potential project planning for each five-year period. Please note: These are estimates, and the farther into the future, the less certain these estimates will be. Uncertainty around funding, land base, land exchanges, Culmination of Mean Annual Increment (CMAI), etc., all contribute to potential inaccuracy. The table included in the presentation was an attempt to simplify the information and provide comparative estimates of old growth and young growth volumes.

Following the presentation, the TAC discussed their desire for more certainty about the transition, e.g., with respect to when young growth timber sales will be offered and when old growth harvest will substantially end. Certainty is important to those who care about old growth as well as to industry that need assurances about supply in order to make long-term investments.

Jason Anderson provided the Thomas Bay project as an example of why young growth projects are not always offered, even in the face of the imperative to transition. The project was proposed for the early transition; however, the ultimate decision was to wait until a later date (approximately five years), because a delay would mean significant additional growth in the stand, and a commensurate increase in economic return from a sale.

Nevertheless, the Forest recognizes there is a need for some level of certainty regarding the timeline for the transition (including what that means for old growth harvest), even though

¹ A summary of the Tongass Integrated Plan (TIP) is available online, [here](#). The spreadsheet of the 2014-2018 TIP is also available, [here](#).

uncertainty is inherent in project planning. Karen Hardigg clarified that according to current plans, approximately 270 MMBF of old growth and 115 MMBF of young growth would be available in the next five years, but recognized that there is still considerable uncertainty associated with those estimates. The Forest is looking to the TAC for recommendations to help address the concerns about supply and uncertainty.

Miscellaneous Updates

Chris Maisch updated the Committee on progress of the Roadless Rule litigation. In the latest rounds of the two cases being pursued, the State has prevailed. One is in the U.S. Court of Appeals District Court of Columbia, and is based on a technical point on how the Tolling Rule was applied to the determination of the statute of limitations. The case can be appealed for an en banc hearing, or go back to the lower court for a hearing on the merits of the 2001 Clinton Roadless Rule. The other case is scheduled for an en banc hearing in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, and is focused on reinstating the Roadless Rule exemption for the Tongass. This case will be heard in early December by the full judge panel. Both cases will likely take a few years to be determined and could find their way to the Supreme Court before final resolution. Depending on the outcomes, these cases could have a major impact on how the Tongass is managed in the next five years.

Developing Alternatives for the Forest Plan Amendment

The TAC reviewed and discussed the process and timeline for developing draft alternatives for the Forest Plan Amendment. Randy Fairbanks, of Tetra Tech (the contractor for the Plan Amendment analysis), summarized the expected timeline, with the preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) slated for March 2015, and the published version to be released in June 2015. Jason Anderson stressed the value of developing recommendations for a TAC alternative by January 2015, so that it can be analyzed for the DEIS along with the alternatives being drafted by the IDT. The hope is that there will be an opportunity for the TAC to review the outputs of Tetra Tech's analysis before the DEIS is published.

Given the tight timeframe, Jason urged the group to prioritize the development of recommendations for the Plan Amendment that are as concrete and specific as possible, particularly regarding the land base (i.e., "where and how to manage the public resources that are affected by the Plan"). The TAC can either provide interest-based recommendations that can be translated into Plan Amendment components (i.e., Desired Future Conditions; Goals and Objectives; and Standards and Guidelines) or recommendations that are already framed as Plan components. The Amendment will be structured in a way that reprints the entire Plan, with certain components being amended. The 2008 Amendment included Desired Future Conditions for each alternative. To remain consistent with amending the Plan rather than a full revision, it is important to only amend certain components, but not entire sections. Jason reminded the Committee that if the components are relevant to the transition, it is appropriate to amend them.

The TAC also has the choice to provide other recommendations they deem important for the transition, such as improvements to the five-year plan, contracting, landowner coordination, and appraisals. While related to the transition, these kinds of implementation strategies will not be covered in the Plan alternatives, even though they may tie to some of the Plan components. Strategies that are not incorporated into Plan alternatives may potentially be included in the Record of Decision (ROD).

Jason also explained that the 2012 Planning Rule decouples monitoring from the Forest Plan. Carol Seitz-Warmuth, Tongass Inventory and Monitoring Coordinator, explained that the Forest will develop the monitoring plan after the development of the alternatives and DEIS. Monitoring is essential to an adaptive management strategy in which Plan components are evaluated and then updated and re-evaluated as necessary. She also noted that “species of conservation concern” have replaced “management indicator species” as a monitoring component. Jason encouraged the TAC to provide recommendations about possible monitoring metrics, but to do so after they focus on Plan Amendment recommendations, since the development of the monitoring plan will not begin until October 2015. In the meantime, if ideas come up related to monitoring, they will be documented for discussion at a later date.

Draft Compilation of Working Drafts

Facilitator Connie Lewis reviewed a draft compilation document comprised of working drafts prepared by individual TAC members for various work groups (not necessarily endorsed by other work group members), and in a few instances of language drawn from TAC meeting summaries. She clarified that the compilation document was a draft, not previously endorsed by the TAC. The purposes of the document were to facilitate TAC review of the working drafts by putting them all in one place, organized roughly around Plan Amendment components, and help TAC members identify what still needed to be addressed to achieve agreement on Plan Amendment recommendations by January 2015. The draft document is available online, [here](#). Much of the information in the draft served as the basis for the key issues deliberations described below.

TAC members identified topics not covered in the compilation draft, but still needing their consideration, including: subsistence fishing, the role of timber export, karst², CMAI, fisheries (specifically the T77 overlay)³, and cultural resources.

² Jim Baichtal, Geologist for the Tongass, developed a Karst Q&A sheet for reference by the TAC, which provides a variety of background information on karst resources. This document is available online, [here](#).

³ The T77 overlay refers to high value watersheds for fisheries, as defined by an effort led by Southeast Alaska fisherman and other individuals interested in increasing protections for fish habitat on the Tongass. The areas are based on an ecological regional assessment of areas critical to resource production. Most of these areas are unroaded. For more information on the T77 concept, see <http://americansalmonforest.org/faqs/>.

Work Group Reports and Discussion

Purpose and Need – “Why”

Andrew Thoms, Chair of the Why Work Group, reviewed the draft Purpose and Need Statement that the Work Group developed.⁴ The goals of the Work Group’s Purpose and Need Statement, building off of the TAC Vision Statement, were to provide context regarding the role of the Tongass in Southeast Alaska; explain the purposes of the TAC and what the TAC hopes to accomplish through the Amendment; and articulate why the Amendment is needed. The Work Group also wanted to reflect a focus on benefits to local communities and a desire to move beyond conflict. The Draft Statement follows the format of Purpose and Needs statements in past Plans, with some language taken verbatim from the current Plan, and other language from the Leader’s Intent, the TAC Charter, and the Secretary’s Memo. It was drafted to be consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements.

Jason Anderson clarified that there is an introduction that will serve as a reference for the entire Plan document, whereas the Purpose and Need for the Plan Amendment drives the range of alternatives for the Amendment. The Forest Service (FS) is refining the Purpose and Need Statement, with a timeline of internal review to occur in December 2014. This Statement applies to the entire NEPA document; all reasonable alternatives will need to comply with the Purpose and Need. Because of the timeline for review, the Committee worked on finalizing language for a Purpose and Need Statement to submit to the IDT for consideration.

The TAC provided feedback on the Draft Purpose and Need Statement together, editing for clarity and brevity. They also worked to ensure that all of their interests and perspectives were represented and balanced throughout the document; for example, subsistence and cultural values were added, and there was a discussion about finding the balance between conservation and timber interests. They agreed that the document should reflect the unique experience that the Tongass has to offer for all user groups and communities. Another important edit involved removing value judgments, for example stating certain information as the views or values of society as a whole. The TAC agreed to allow the facilitation team to do a final copy-edit on the draft. The final version is available online, [here](#). Jason Anderson is seeking clarification about the formal process for forwarding TAC recommendations (e.g., whether they need initially to go through the Secretary’s office). Once he confirms the process, the document will be forwarded through appropriate channels for consideration by Sue Howle and the Plan Amendment Interdisciplinary Team.

⁴ This draft is included in the [Tongass Advisory Committee Compilation of Working Drafts](#), pp. 3-5.

The Purpose and Need Group also developed draft Desired Future Conditions and Goals and Objectives for renewable energy. Jason Anderson clarified that if the Committee feels that renewable energy is relevant to the Charter direction, they should be clear in their recommendations about how alternative energy resources relate to speeding the transition (for example, how biomass fits in). It was also suggested that biomass relates to the whether or not the transition includes export versus value-added processing; since biomass results from a waste-stream, it would not be available from an industry based on export. However, it was also suggested that regardless of the result of harvest, there is always biomass available from tree-tops. The TAC will return to the topic of renewable energy at a later date, focusing on both how it can dovetail with the transition, and how it may be important as a standalone topic.

Land Base/Land Use Designations – “Where”

Wade Zammit, Chair of the Where Work Group, reviewed the assumptions and outputs of analysis that the Group requested for available young growth acres on the Tongass. The outputs were organized by 5-year periods, displaying young growth that is in age class 60 years and greater, high site class, and located within one mile of a road or ½ mile of a shore. (In the future, the group can also include medium site-classes to determine availability of additional acres.) The largest portion is currently designated Suitable, followed by beach buffers and Old Growth Reserves (OGRs). In terms of timeframe, during years 16-20, the amount of available young growth quadruples compared to current levels. Wade clarified that these acres have likely not undergone precommercial thinning (PCT), because that was not a priority in the past. Also, the estimates do not include any form of “net-down.”

Standards and Guidelines – “How”

Erin Steinkruger, Chair of the How Work Group, introduced the three categories of standards and guidelines the Group had focused on to date: scenery standards, coordination with adjacent landowners, and timber harvest on non-development LUDs. While these issues were prioritized by initial consideration by the Work Group, it was noted that there are other standards and guidelines that the TAC will likely eventually also want to address (e.g., cultural/heritage resources and recreation).

Scenery Standards

Scenery standards have the potential to significantly impact young growth harvest because the standards and guidelines affect so many acres.⁵ The Work Group suggests relaxing the scenery standards and guidelines to the lowest possible level for young growth. Because these are previously harvested acres, the Work Group believed there is a reduced need to

⁵ See [Things to know about Scenery Management on the Tongass](#), prepared by Danielle Snyder, Tongass Landscape Architect, for an overview of the impacts of scenery standards on the ability to harvest young growth.

“hide” clear-cut acres. They also suggested that scenery corridors should be re-evaluated because the current corridors may in some cases be based on erroneous analysis, and may not necessarily be warranted.

Jason Anderson clarified that scenery standards are driven by “scenic integrity objectives,” and even in timber development LUDs, the size of openings created by timber harvest is restricted by these standards. Even with a “low” scenic integrity objective, about 80,000 acres of young growth would be reserved from harvest, through reduced opening size, to preserve the scenery of the landscape. Un-harvested portions of those stands reserved by scenery standards at the initial young growth harvest could be available for harvest after an approximate 20-year “green up” period for initial YG harvest. Under this management approach, acres are not off-limits to harvest – rather broken up over time to reduce impacts to scenery. A scenic integrity objective of less than “low” would require approval from the Chief.

There was a suggestion that visual priority routes could be re-defined based on which routes are considered most important by the tourism industry. The Work Group also brought forward the suggestion for giving flexibility to line officers to interpret scenery guidelines on a project-specific basis. Ultimately the TAC decided to review modeling run outputs before further discussion of scenery standards. Ultimately the TAC decided to review the modeling run outputs before further discussion of scenery standards.

Coordination with Adjacent Landowners

Jaeleen Araujo presented the Work Group’s suggestion about the need for guidelines for the Forest to coordinate second growth harvest activities with adjacent landowners (e.g., private, State, Mental Health, etc.). Specifically, the Forest should be required to coordinate with other landowners in the vicinity of particular projects in order to facilitate resource sharing (e.g., contractors, road/bridge work, etc.). This could involve something like an interagency council, or it could be more informal. The Work Group requested more information from the Forest on the coordination mechanisms that currently exist, in hopes of informing recommendations that would be most impactful. Jason Anderson clarified that there are policies at the regional and national level that influence coordination with other landowners, as well as cooperative agreements at the project-level, but that implementation has been challenging.

Non-Development LUDs

Keith Rush described a potential approach to incorporating non-development LUDs into the young growth timber base. The assumptions he developed were based on a patch-cut concept, with a four-stage treatment where 25% of a stand is treated at a time, with opening sizes limited to 10 acres. The concept was developed based on benefits to wildlife and

improving diversity in the stands, while striving for openings large enough to be economically viable and for treating stem exclusion.⁶ Keith explained that the biggest threat to wildlife is winter range, so larger opening sizes would impact access. However, openings are beneficial to promoting understory growth around the edges of the opening.

Concern was expressed about entering non-development LUDs on a permanent basis. As an alternative, there was a suggestion to consider one-time rotation only, with a clear focus on the benefits to other resources (i.e., stem exclusion and wildlife habitat). An alternative view was to view entry into non-development LUDs for young growth harvest as a trade-off for moving away from old growth harvest. Keith explained that the only way to effectively address stem exclusion would be to complete at least one full implementation of the concept.

Combined Where and How Work Groups – “Wow”

The TAC agreed that a constructive next step would be for the Where and How Work Groups to combine to discuss modeling outputs based on possible adjustments to standards and guidelines. It was noted that The Nature Conservancy has a contract with Mason, Bruce & Girard, a consulting firm that is also subcontracted under Tetra Tech, to run a modeling exercise with a set of assumptions that Keith Rush developed based on the patch-cut concept described above. Wade Zammit has produced a second set of assumptions for comparison purposes, to be modeled by the same contractor, which take a more “aggressive” approach to harvest levels, with more frequent harvest and a vacation from standards and guidelines for scenery and karst.

Keith described the assumptions for his modeling exercise, which were designed to be economic, but with a conservation filter to address stem-exclusion through PCT for both wildlife habitat and the timber resource. CMAI is relaxed in this scenario, with a harvest trigger of 12” diameter and minimum of 25,000 BF/acre. Each stand would be entered every 25 years. For each entry, there would be a 25% removal, with each interval based on site productivity. There would be no restrictions in the suitable/available timber base. The model includes a relaxed scenery component, which uses variable retention harvest with leave islands within cutting units. After 50 years, when the rest of the stand has grown, those islands are harvested. The model also addresses karst, based on vulnerability. Based on preliminary analysis, it appears that an annual cut of as much as 40 MMBF is potentially feasible during the initial 15-year transition period. The annual cut then increased over time, reaching 100 MMBF in 25 years, where it would level off for a consistent and sustainable harvest level.

⁶ Dave Albert, Science Director at The Nature Conservancy, developed an overview of the scientific basis behind the patch cut concept, and agrees with the need for active management in stem excluded stands. Contact Dave at dalbert@tnc.org for a copy of his reasoning.

The scenario that Wade developed will use the same base assumptions. However, rather than harvesting only 25% at a time, this model will harvest 50% each time, and as opposed to a 10 acre opening size limit, this approach will allow 15 acre openings. It also includes a strong replant program to help with species selection. Everything will be harvested except a 200 foot beach buffer. This includes a complete vacation on the visual standards and guidelines and karst requirements, waiving the requirements during the transition period on young growth acres. One main difference in outputs is that it will allow for a second harvest within the 15 year transition period, whereas Keith's model only allows for one.

The primary goal of the model runs is to serve as a starting point for discussion on the trade-offs of harvest in the non-development LUDs, particularly the beach buffers and OGRs, as well as to illustrate the impacts of certain standards and guidelines. For example, the outputs can show the impacts of changing scenery standards compared with the impacts of harvesting in beach buffers. With the benefit of the information from the model runs the TAC will be able to discuss the social acceptability of either (or both) option(s) and during what timeframe. It is not clear how the outputs will be organized; ideally they will allow for additional comparisons, for example, the impacts of removing Riparian Management Areas (RMAs). It was also noted that neither scenario accounts for net-down, so these are optimistic estimates.

Key Issues Deliberations

Culmination of Mean Annual Increment

CMAI refers to the requirement that a timber stand cannot be managed through clear-cut or even-aged management until it has reached 95% of CMAI⁷. There are options for relaxing or providing exceptions to this restriction, both at the Forest-level and the project-level. The current Forest Plan does not include language regarding exceptions to CMAI; however, with the current Amendment process, there is an option to develop exceptions to CMAI Forest-wide, by describing the conditions that would need to be met for even-aged management to occur at less than CMAI. Similar exception language can also be created at the project-level, by creating a project-level Amendment to the Plan, as long as it is consistent with the exception language in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). The third option is to seek a relaxation through legislation.

Jason Anderson encouraged the TAC to be very specific about when, how, and under what circumstances they might suggest any exemptions from CMAI. More specificity will improve the Agency's ability to analyze the effects. He also reminded the group that CMAI is not limited to clear-cutting the stand in its entirety, but could be affected by the opening

⁷ CMAI applies to regeneration harvest only; thinning can occur at any age.

size as well. As currently written, if the opening size exceeds what is allowed for thinning or uneven-aged management, CMAI will apply. Therefore, the TAC's recommendations should address opening size.

The TAC discussed redefining the "harvest trigger" for determining when to harvest a stand (as opposed to CMAI, which is a biologically defined harvest trigger). Jason pointed out that there is so much variability within and between stands that choosing a specific age as a harvest trigger would be problematic. Other options mentioned by the group included economic harvest triggers such as mean annual diameter, board feet per stand, or "two-log trees". Regardless of the trigger used for harvest, the TAC recognized the importance of avoiding "boom and bust" cycles.

The TAC discussed in some detail the implications of using CMAI versus the "two-log tree" concept as a harvest trigger. While height might be comparable, the tree diameter of a two-log tree could average approximately 16-18" while a tree that reaches CMAI at 90 years would be approximately 30-40". A member stated that in many places, in Norway for example, it is common to harvest trees at a smaller diameter, and the infrastructure there is designed accordingly. Allowing harvest at a smaller diameter would allow for harvesting stands twice in the amount of time it would take to achieve CMAI once. Changing the harvest trigger does not necessarily require harvest to occur at an earlier age; rather it allows for options. Ultimately the TAC questioned the benefit of specifying a harvest trigger. Rather, they talked about the option of giving the Forest authority to relax CMAI as well as flexibility to choose when to harvest a particular stand based on a variety of considerations. There was some concern, however, about the ability of the Forest to put forward timber sales that are economically feasible, and also the importance of a trigger for modeling purposes.

The TAC also talked about whether a relaxation of CMAI should apply to the transition period only, or into perpetuity. There was recognition that the short-term strategy may be different than the long-term strategy with regards to land management on the Forest. In the short-term, quick rotation forestry will likely be necessary to enable the transition to primarily young growth harvest, but there is a need to ensure the Forest functions sustainably in the long-term. In relation to CMAI, relaxation will be critical to speed the transition through short rotations. In the long-term the stands should be managed for a diversity of products, thereby reducing risk and uncertainty of future markets, while still allowing a sense of certainty of timber supply following the transition.

Because of the large amount of young growth timber that will become available starting in approximately 15-20 years, many of the stands will not be harvested until older age classes (beyond the two-log trigger), allowing for diversity of products. Even with these larger trees, though, there will still be smaller logs for the mills that retool; for example, large diameter trees have small diameter tops, and lower site classes will produce smaller trees, even when they have reached CMAI. The TAC also stressed that regardless of what happens with CMAI, there will always be a need for small sales and micro-sales for old growth niche

markets. Ultimately, the Committee suggested the idea of relaxation of CMAI during a trial period, which could be revisited if effective.

The TAC discussed outputs of the Where Work Group with relation for a potential maximum of acres that could be relaxed under CMAI. In the near-term (<8 years), there will not be any young growth that has reached CMAI, at 13 years, there will only be 1000 acres that have reached 95% of CMAI. In that same timeframe (15 years), there are 38,000 acres of young growth available, with most of it needing a relaxation of CMAI.

Using the language included in the proposed Sealaska legislation as a starting point, the TAC talked about what they might support in terms of relaxing CMAI. There was an agreement subject to the following key points:

- The initial time period for relaxing the current standards will be fifteen years.
- There will be a total cap of 40,000 acres.
 - During the first ten years the annual cap will be 3,000 acres.
 - During the last five years, the annual cap will be 5,000 acres.

The agreement was based on the assumption that this would be applied on suitable acres. On non-development LUDs, the TAC still needs to have a broader conversation around social acceptability before determining a relaxation of CMAI on those acres. The TAC agreed to revisit this language after the model runs have been completed, before making a formal recommendation on relaxation of CMAI.

Old Growth Bridge Timber

The TAC discussed the need to provide recommendations on old growth bridge timber for the transition period, as well as the long-term future of old growth. While it will not be included in the Amendment as a Plan Component, they identified the need to at least begin discussing the topic in order to reach agreement on other components. They also recognized the integral tie to the definition of a viable industry (i.e., type and number of businesses and jobs), and the issues of young growth supply and industry demand. Regarding the question of maintaining the existing industry, there was a concern about focusing exclusively on businesses that currently exist, because the industry will inevitably evolve over time. Instead, it was suggested, the primary emphasis should be on benefits to communities, as opposed to individual businesses.

The group noted the importance of retaining critical infrastructure and expertise given the extraordinary amount of capital that would be required to rebuild infrastructure should it be lost; the integrated nature of businesses; and the unique expertise required for an effective timber industry to thrive in Southeast Alaska (i.e., given remote locations, weather

considerations, etc.). Infrastructure retention is also important for restoration purposes.⁸ There is a large amount (100 MMBF +) of second growth in need of management to treat for stem exclusion for both wildlife and timber benefits.

There are a variety of infrastructure requirements, some unique to Alaska. Loggers are essential - small operators do not have a business without them. There are currently five selective harvest contractors; to lose one would result in a loss of 20%. And logging camps, which are essential in this landscape, can each have 20-25 pieces of equipment that would be difficult to replace. There was a range of opinion expressed regarding the potential role of a large mill (such as Viking - especially since Viking operators have indicated a lack of interest in young growth products). Some TAC members believe a mill of that size is critically important to the future timber industry in Southeast Alaska. In addition to physical infrastructure, the TAC also recognized the importance of expertise and intellectual capital. Many owners and operators in the region are approaching retirement age, and in many cases there is not a clear successor.

To transition to young growth, businesses will need to retool, innovate, and prepare themselves for a new product, new resource, and new markets. The timing and structure of the changes in old growth will have a major impact on the businesses; many businesses are already making the investments, so the transition can encourage them (and others) to further innovate and transition. Sawmills that are currently dependent on old growth will need to significantly revamp their operations, regardless of the approach to ramping up/ramping down the timber supply. There is a need for assistance developing markets and for a supply of old growth until there is sufficient young growth to maintain the critical infrastructure for a viable industry. In the long term there should be more than enough young growth for sustained yield on an annual basis. Beyond the transition, marketing will be just as important for old growth as young growth. There was a suggestion that timber from the Tongass should be something to be proud of, and could be marketed as a unique product (e.g., similar to Alaskan salmon). However, ultimately, it will be up to entrepreneurs to determine how to be competitive in a young growth market.

Businesses also need to have incentives, including consistent supply, to invest in the region. It will be important to give hope to the industry by providing clear direction and a timeline for the transition to young growth so they can make informed decisions about the future of their companies - whether or not the TAC agrees on a specific suggested target for old growth harvest during the transition. The Forest needs to be sending a clear message that the transition is occurring. The TAC's recommendations and the Forest Plan Amendment

⁸ Keith Rush referred to TNC's "[Restoring America's Forests](#)" initiatives for more information about restoration activities on National Forests.

can contribute to that message, and hopefully build the kind of trust and social buy-in that can help reduce the litigation currently surrounding the timber sales program.

Once the model runs are completed, the TAC will likely have a better idea of when old growth will “ramp down” and to what extent, based on the young growth “ramp up”. Assuming that some old growth harvest will continue beyond the transition for niche markets, it will be helpful to have recommendations from the TAC regarding the amount of old growth harvest they think would be socially acceptable over the long term.

Supply/Demand

Nicole Grewe, Regional Economist for the USFS Alaska Region, reviewed findings from her research conducted while she was with the State of Alaska regarding current/existing industry demand.⁹ She stressed that demand, harvest, and supply are not the same, even though the terms are often used interchangeably. Many of the 86 businesses she interviewed for her research were confident in market demand for their products, while still operating at a diminished capacity. The demand figure from the approximately 60 timber tract, saw mills, and manufacturing businesses who responded to a question about how much volume was needed to maintain their current operations was 143 MMBF per year, (however the research did not differentiate between old and young growth). Nicole noted that there is likely a substantial exaggeration factor in the responses, due in part to the fact that volumes may be double or even triple counted (i.e., logging, milling, and manufacturing using the same log). She estimated the actual demand for current operations at about 40 MMBF per year from the Forest, which corresponds with recent average annual Forest harvest numbers (35-40 MMBF). The timber demand estimates for current operations numbers are higher when all lands in Southeast Alaska are included (i.e., Tongass National Forest, Mental Health, Sealaska, etc.): 109 MMBF for harvesting companies, 32 MMBF for sawmills, and 2 MMBF for manufacturers. Focusing solely on the demand for harvesting operations, Nicole was fairly confident that there is no double-counting in these numbers.

It was noted that the potential Sealaska lands legislation could impact the supply picture. And, supply needed under a primarily young growth scenario will likely be higher than under a primarily old growth scenario to achieve the same economic return. This is because young growth is generally less economically viable in than old growth. Given these factors and the amount of uncertainty about future markets etc., there was a suggestion to develop a few different demand scenarios for both old and young growth from the Forest rather than trying to settle on a single demand number for each.

⁹ The information provided by Nicole Grewe was produced as part of research for the State of Alaska Timber Jobs Task Force. It is not associated with the demand analysis that she will be producing for the TLMP Amendment.

Cultural/Heritage/Subsistence Resources

The TAC discussion regarding cultural, heritage and subsistence resources resulted in a suggestion to generally abide by the existing standards and guidelines for cultural resources for young growth timber management. However, one area needing attention may be in the active management of young growth stands to improve deer habitat for subsistence hunting, i.e., shifting the focus from simply protecting the resource to responding to the threat of stem exclusion. Important subsistence products such as “Kaayaani plants,” berries, and spruce root should also be considered. In addition, Jason Anderson alerted the TAC to the fact that there is a high probability of finding archeological sites in the beach buffers. The requirement to avoid or mitigate the effects of entering these sites will likely impact harvest in those areas.

Definition of a “Viable Industry”

Several different concepts emerged in the TAC’s discussion about what constitutes a “viable industry”. One was “the ability of a thing to maintain itself” while avoiding the pitfalls associated with trying to define “profitable” or “successful.” This is consistent with the previously articulated point that the Forest can create the opportunity by contributing to supply, but that it is the responsibility of businesses to maintain themselves.

Another concept of “viable industry” was to define the infrastructure needed to manage the landscape for both ecological and economic outputs whether or not that infrastructure exists in the current industry. There could actually be areas where more infrastructure is needed compared to what is currently available, e.g., where stem-exclusion is problematic.

The Committee also discussed the concept of a “just” transition, one that provides a reliable supply of old growth for niche markets, provides a continuous and sustainable supply of young growth into the future, and is “just” (or fair) for the people, businesses, and communities impacted by the transition. Since there is no way of knowing precisely what may happen in the future, the focus should be on providing a reasonable range of economic opportunities for the communities today and into the future. Rather than focusing on the timber industry (e.g., loggers and mills) alone, there was a suggestion to think broadly about the nature of “the industry” and the concept of infrastructure – to include the multitude of businesses that are intertwined with the actual timber harvest piece (e.g., parts suppliers, hydraulic shops, saw shops, transport, etc.). All of these and others contribute to the viability, resiliency and adaptability of Southeast Alaskan communities.

Areas of Emerging Common Understanding

Connie Lewis reviewed topics that seemed to be emerging as potential areas of common understanding, based on the discussions during the meeting (although not necessarily agreed by every TAC member or ready to be translated into recommendations).

1. A viable timber industry and/or infrastructure are needed in Southeast Alaska for: restoration work for habitat and other ecological purposes; and in support of communities, jobs, and people that depend on that industry.
 2. It is not the Forest's responsibility or within its capacity to ensure the viability of individual businesses or companies. Rather, companies make their own choices and deal with the market on their own terms. The Forest can contribute to supply, but not make business decisions. Therefore, it may be helpful to disassociate the discussion from individual companies, and instead talk about infrastructure needs in general.
 3. There is a need for some old growth bridge timber between now and when there is a significant enough amount of young growth available for a predominantly young growth timber future. There will be trade-offs in order to hasten the transition, for example potentially harvesting young growth in controversial areas such as the beach fringe or OGRs.
 4. There is strong desire to protect other resources through the transition, e.g., salmon and recreation, among others.
-

Discussions with USDA and USFS Leadership

The meeting was attended by US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and the Environment, Robert Bonnie; USFS Alaska Regional Forester, Beth Pendleton; and, Tongass National Forest Supervisor, Forrest Cole. In preparation for their discussion with the Under Secretary, the TAC discussed key messages they wanted to share, and questions they wanted to ask. Because Under Secretary Bonnie is regularly updated about the TAC, the TAC focused on the opportunity for real engagement and discussion as opposed to process updates.

The TAC discussion about key messages started with a set of concepts included in a draft document prepared by Erin Steinkruger (See Appendix B for the draft document.) The concepts included: flexibility, transparency, creativity, innovation, and risk – all underlying the notion that the FS as a whole needs to transform if the Tongass National Forest transition to primarily young growth is to be successful. In this spirit, the TAC decided to ask leadership, “What is your commitment to ensuring the TAC’s recommendations are seriously considered and that the transition is successfully implemented?” More specifically, what is leadership’s willingness to:

- Exert strong leadership and long-term commitment (i.e., beyond the 4-year election cycle) to implement the recommendations;
- Provide certainty for all uses and user groups;
- Make a commitment to rural/community development;
- Ensure FS accountability; and

- Show the courage and political will to take action and assume the same kind of risk that TAC members are taking by participating on the Committee.

Welcome from the Under Secretary

Under Secretary Bonnie expressed gratitude for the amount of time, work, and travel that the members are dedicating to the TAC. He recognized the spectacular resource that the Tongass is, declaring it the “crown jewel of the National Forest system,” and stressed the importance of the TAC’s recommendations for determining a path forward. He emphasized the Forest’s and USDA’s commitment to collaboration to create better projects, better plans, and more public buy-in. Based on experiences throughout the nation, he believes that a collaborative, deliberative approach creates the best opportunity to succeed. For this issue in particular, the opportunity is to bring new ideas to the table, challenge the Forest and USDA to make necessary improvements, and ultimately achieve a successful transition. In his mind, the ideal outcome is one that satisfies all interests, resulting in a stable, viable industry with a more certain timber supply for the long-term, as well as certainty for the conservation sector. He stressed the Agency’s commitment to the transition, and a promise to take the recommendations very seriously for the Plan Amendment and beyond.

Presentation to the Under Secretary

Committee members Erin Steinkruger and Wade Zammit presented key points on behalf of the TAC. Erin expressed the Committee’s concerns in the form of a metaphor, stating, “If you go out on a limb, it’s always good to know who holds the saw and who holds the net.” Wade elaborated on the statement, expressing concern about the risk that the Committee members are facing due to the pressures from their constituencies. This is a problem that has been going on for 38 years without resolution, and in order to find a solution, the TAC needs assurance from leadership that they are “holding the net.” In other words, when they receive the recommendations from the TAC, there needs to be a level of support. He also stressed the importance of an equal amount of effort on behalf of the FS to evolve its culture to one that embodies flexibility, transparency, risk, creativity, and innovation. Without this cultural shift and Agency transformation, the collaborative efforts of the TAC will be in vain.

TAC Conversation with the Under Secretary

Under Secretary Bonnie recognized skepticism and cynicism that surrounds collaboration, and the need for local buy-in for it to be successful. However, he believes that it is possible on the Tongass, because the TAC has the opportunity to go beyond politics and create a path forward for everyone. He repeated the willingness of the Agency to take risks and use the recommendations put forward by the TAC. In other words, he agreed to be the “net.” The Secretary and other leadership within the administration are also willing to help provide organizational support.

Following the initial overview and presentation, the Committee members had the opportunity for informal dialogue with Under Secretary Bonnie, resulting in the following questions and responses:

Q: Timber management on the Tongass is unique, so expertise and institutional knowledge is essential; however, the majority of the industry is approaching retirement age. Due to rules and regulations from the government, and issues associated with implementation, what is the incentive for businesses to continue on the Tongass?

A: While we can't solve many of the greater concerns about rules and regulations (i.e., EPA, OSHA, etc.), we can try to create certainty around supply and encourage stakeholder/public buy-in.

Q: The Secretary's memorandum states that the transition will result in "predominantly young growth" – what does this mean for the future of old growth harvest?

A: We understand there is a need for micro-sales and specialty mills for old growth. The term "predominantly" was chosen purposely; the expectation is that the future will be primarily young growth, but understand the need for continued sales of old growth in certain instances. We hope that you (the TAC) can help determine the specifics around this.

Q: With the understanding that old growth will continue, there are also constituents that want to see the sales of old growth diminished. How do you see the process for "ramping down" old growth, yet maintaining a viable industry?

A: That is exactly the issue at hand. Our commitment is to make the transition happen quickly but recognize we have to do in a way that sustains industry. The Secretary's memo laid out a 10-15 year timeframe, but we are realizing that there is not enough young growth available right now, and there are obstacles and trade-offs involved with implementation. We cannot promise that the industry will be exactly as it is now, but we can create certainty of supply for industry to determine how to invest their resources. This is another topic for which we would like your input.

Q: Even if there was enough young growth volume, businesses are not financially prepared for the necessary shift in their business paradigm. What role is the USDA willing to play in financial assistance and marketing?

A: There are a variety of things we can do to be more proactive, including financial assistance associated with rural development. USDA assists with marketing for agriculture and some wood products, so it could possibly be an area we could engage in.

Follow-Up: The USDA and FS should purchase locally processed young growth for projects on the Forest (e.g., small bridge construction, trail tread/stairways, cabins/recreation structures, etc.), thereby helping to incentivize local startups to keep the knowledge and skills alive in the region.

Q: Commercial fishing (specifically salmon) stabilizes the economy for the region. Timber products could be marketed as “salmon-friendly” because if timber is managed for the health of fisheries, the rest of the Forest and region will be healthy as well. Because of the importance of other resources, such as fishing, do you see a role for another Advisory Committee, or an extension of this one, to address economic diversification and resilience?

A: We understand the importance of those discussions, but we have not thought about another formal Federal Advisory Committee to address other resources. However, Regional Forester Pendleton has been involved in the Economic Cluster Initiative that allows for more informal conversations. We’ve asked you to focus on timber specifically because of the Plan Amendment, but we don’t want to exclude all the other issues and resources.

Q: There has been quite a bit of frustration with implementation and business practices. Many FS tools were developed decades ago and are in need of updating, or even completely reinvented. Is leadership open to new ideas for policy and legislation? How will you help our recommendations become implemented?

A: We are very open to hearing your suggestions for overcoming the barriers that exist. I agree that there is a need for new “tools in the toolbox,” as well as the need to explore partnerships to address capacity challenges. We have experimented with new options, for example through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Farm Bill Good Neighbor Authority.

A few TAC members closed the session with the following reflections:

- It is important to focus on what *can* be done rather than on what *cannot* be done. This will require a cultural change by TAC members, interest groups, and the Agency, and most importantly, a leadership commitment to achieving what is possible.
- New institutional arrangements and partnerships are another encouraging method for moving the transition forward.
- Regardless of what happens moving forward, the Tongass will always be a Native place, and to always remember the significance of that reality for the people of Southeast Alaska whose ancestral home is at stake.

Forest Plan Amendment Progress and Decision Expectations

Tongass Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole reviewed the process for developing a Plan Amendment, and summarized progress to date. He echoed Under Secretary Bonnie’s appreciation for the Committee, and agreed that he would seriously consider any consensus recommendations from the TAC; however, he stressed the importance of keeping within the timeline. Forrest introduced the contractors for the Amendment, Dave Cox and Randy Fairbanks of Tetra Tech, and explained that the Amendment process has approximately 177 steps, of which the TAC alternative is only a portion.

As the first National Forest to develop a Plan Amendment under the 2012 Planning Rule, the Tongass has to innovate, learn and adapt through the process. The current Amendment

framework currently includes four alternatives, although new concepts continue to emerge as the process is evolving. The State of Alaska has recently submitted an alternative. Once the TAC produces its recommendations, whether in the form of an alternative or in another form, there will be an opportunity to explain underlying assumptions and reasoning behind the recommendations to the IDT and Tetra Tech to help inform their alternatives assessment. Following the assessment, the TAC may be able to suggest small changes to their alternative, but if the TAC desires a large-scale change to their alternative, they will need to wait for the DEIS to suggest changes prior to the final version.

In response to a question about the major takeaways from the process thus far, USDA and Forest leadership responded by expressing encouragement and optimism. Regional Forester Pendleton expressed gratitude and appreciation for the level of commitment and enthusiasm of the TAC, and her willingness to urge the Agency to address implementation challenges and business practices. Under Secretary Bonnie echoed those sentiments, and asked the TAC to focus on the Plan Amendment first, and then address the implementation concerns after January. Forest Supervisor Cole expressed his confidence in the TAC to produce the recommendations, but also recognized the amount of work that lies ahead.

Public Comment

The Committee encourages members of the public to provide input through oral and/or written comment. Every TAC meeting includes public comment period(s). Prior to the meeting, several written comments were received. All written comments are available online, [here](#). There was also a request to review the public scoping comments received from the Notice of Intent (NOI) for the Plan Amendment. An analysis of these comments is available, [here](#). The following comments were offered during the meeting, with many of the members of the public expressing gratitude to Under Secretary Bonnie listening to their input:

Rebecca Knight, a Petersburg resident and former employee of the Forest and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, has operated a family-run commercial fishing business for over 40 years. She believes that the transition has taken longer than necessary and that the end of old growth logging should occur immediately. By considering all uses of the Forest, there are other ways to protect local jobs outside of the timber industry. Timber infrastructure will depend on government appropriations that are difficult to ensure, so it will be necessary to evaluate whether the Tongass is able to compete on world markets. Rebecca expressed concern about the impacts to watersheds and fisheries, particularly if OGRs and beach buffers are opened to logging young growth. These areas, in addition to steep slopes and scenic viewsheds, are extremely important to the conservation strategy. She suggests the TAC listen to a presentation by a Forest biologist regarding the original conservation strategy. She also expressed concern that the State of Alaska's One Voice policy has a major influence on timber planning, yet it conflicts with the need for informed

decision-making by blocking knowledge of fish and wildlife impacts of timber¹⁰. Particularly disconcerting is the fact that the State developed an alternative for the Plan Amendment.

Other concerns included:

- Forest guidance: There appears to be inappropriate guidance by the Forest and the potential for a predetermined outcome, since Forest Supervisor Cole suggested that the TAC alternative will likely fall somewhere in the middle of the Forest's proposed alternatives.
- TAC makeup: The makeup of the TAC should be broader to include more interests.
- Stewardship contracts: Stewardship contracts should not include old growth if the goal is to "wean ourselves off of old growth."
- Stream protection: Class IV streams need to be protected on the Tongass.
- Litigation: As long as old growth continues to be part of timber harvest, there will always be litigation.
- Export: Timber supply should be kept within the region, and export (particularly of cedar) should stop immediately.
- Climate change: The TAC should consider the role of the Tongass for climate change.

Larry Edwards of Greenpeace has lived in Sitka for 38 years, and originally came to the area to work for the pulp company. He expressed concern about transparency with the TAC process, including timely access to documents for the public. (This included meeting materials, recordings, and technical issues with the website.¹¹) Larry expressed concern with large-scale old growth timber sales such as Big Thorne, stating that type of sale should not be tolerated. The transition, in his eyes, should have begun when many of the mills closed in the late 1990s. Even since the transition was announced in 2010, the past 4 ½ years have been wasted. The sideboards placed on the TAC are preventing them from addressing the needs for the long-term and short-term futures of local communities, because of the strict timber focus. He urges leadership to redirect the TAC to give wider latitude and broader voices to address these issues. In addition, the conservation voices on the TAC do not represent the broader environmental community interests.

Paul Olson, a commercial fisherman and business owner for the past 40 years, runs a private practice aimed at fish in the nets and the watersheds, and overall conservation, and cares deeply about wildlife. Because he recognized that the TAC is having difficulty defining a viable timber industry, Paul offered a definition of viability as "the ability of a thing to maintain itself." He highlighted the importance of salmon fishing to the economy locally,

¹⁰ Rebecca Knight referenced the article, "Big Problem – Alaska's 'One Voice' resource development policy," by Larry Edwards of Greenpeace as an important document to review. This article is available online, [here](#). She also submitted written comments, also available online, [here](#).

¹¹ After the meeting, all meeting materials and recordings were posted online, [here](#), and the issues with website functionality were addressed. Any future problems with website functioning should be brought to the attention of Liz Duxbury at lduxbury@merid.org.

regionally, nationally, and globally, with Sitka ranked as the 9th fishing port in the nation, followed closely by Ketchikan and Petersburg. In Sitka alone, the commercial fishing industry contributes \$1 million in raw fish tax to the economy. In addition to commercial fishing, salmon needs to be preserved for subsistence uses and recreation. He believes there are opportunities for growth in all of these economies. Based on his information, Paul explained that the timber industry on the Tongass National Forest only represents 0.2% of the regional employment, yet it represents an expensive government program, with annual expenses averaging \$35-50 million – for \$213 million spent in 2007-2012, the return was \$8 million in revenue. In addition, taxpayers are responsible for forest management such as thinning and habitat projects. In contrast, recreation represents \$10 returned for every \$1 of public investment, and a transition to this form of economy would get the “biggest bang for the buck.” He expressed concern about how the timber focus will address the Planning Rule requirements of ecological, economic, and social sustainability. He recognizes that there have been changes in the Forest, but it has not been the major change that is needed. He believes that large-scale old growth logging should end immediately. For example, the clear-cut timber sales, such as Big Thorne and others like it seem like a step backward. He also expressed concern about industrial-scale biomass, particularly in the local schools and hospitals. The use of biomass is opposed by the American Lung Association because of the severe impacts on children and the elderly. In addition, biomass contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

Bert Bergman, a local resident of Sitka, commercial salmon troller for 26 years, and board member for the Seafood Producers Cooperative, recognized the value of the salmon industry for many rural communities in the region. Salmon alone provides \$22 million annually, supporting local taxes, tradesmen, and fleets. With rising protein prices, he believes the salmon boom is just beginning. He expressed concern regarding the effects of clear-cut logging on the fishing industry, particularly due to river temperature changes and water quality. Changes in weather patterns due to warming oceans are also contributing to these issues; for example, the dam is filling faster due to increased rain, which increases sediment-loading in streams. For those reasons, he believes stream buffers should be *increased*, not *decreased*, and the focus should move away from short-term jobs provided by old growth logging.

Garry White, Executive Director of Sitka Economic Development Association and board member for Southeast Conference, presented a letter to the TAC from Shelly Wright, Executive Director of Southeast Conference.¹² Many of the board members have witnessed the decline of the timber industry, and the effects of lawsuits on the small local communities, including issues with funding local governments and schools. Because the Tongass surrounds the communities, all of the forest economies, including timber, recreation, and

¹² A copy of the letter from Shelly Wright is available online with the November public comments, [here](#).

everything else, need to be developed in a balanced way to help with the transition. The timber industry is faced with a completely different industry that will require retooling and new markets; therefore, they need help transitioning. The industry is knowledgeable and capable of being successful, but they need the opportunity. Ideally the TAC will come forward with a product that can allow the industry to move forward and avoid litigation.

Joel Hanson, a 35 year resident of Southeast Alaska, expressed that he felt discouraged by the TAC proceedings, and felt irrelevant as a member of the public. As a representative of The Boat Company, which provides recreational opportunities on the Tongass, he is concerned about what the outcomes of the TAC could mean for their operations and other companies that provide similar visitor services. There are high value recreation sites on the shoreline that have recovered their beauty after the first timber harvest. He is very concerned about the proposal to focus harvest on the shorelines, especially if there is not protection for high value recreation in those areas. In order to provide an outcome that results in fewer lawsuits, he urged the TAC to reduce the threats to recreational interests.

Scott Harris, the Conservation Science Director at the Sitka Conservation Society, provided advice to the TAC on the process and the issues at hand.¹³ Regarding process, he believes the sideboards created for the Committee limit flexibility and creativity for sustainable forest management because of the requirement to maintain the current industry. With this focus, it ignores the innovative capacity of the people in the region. He discussed Dargon Point as an example of this capacity – it was a significant young growth sale that had four bidders, demonstrating that operators are willing to take on the challenge of young growth. He expressed willingness to explore options for a future of working in old growth; however, he believes that large-scale old growth sales limit options for the future. For future management, he encouraged the TAC to make a strong commitment to applying adaptive management, or the process of reviewing and refining the current state of knowledge in order to continually improve. Since the transition is a new paradigm, or an experiment, this is particularly important. While there is currently a commitment to monitoring, that is only one component of adaptive management.

David Beebe, City Councilman and spokesman for the City of Kupreanof on Lindenberg Peninsula, expressed the importance of preserving the rural Southeast Alaska lifestyle and quality of life. This includes access to subsistence hunting and alternative energy options. Because of the fragmented island landscape, the effects of intensive logging have resulted in severe restrictions on the ability to access local deer. Deer winter range is crucial to viable deer populations, but he expressed concern that these areas have been disproportionately targeted for timber harvest. Over the years, Mitkof Island has seen its once abundant deer

¹³ Scott also provided a copy of his comments in written form. These are available online with the November public comments, [here](#).

populations decrease substantially, which has resulted in hunting restrictions for subsistence uses. He believes the problem is due to even-aged management, particularly the logging of old growth. While stewardship and restoration are honorable activities to mitigate the problems, it is not enough to restore the structure and function of an old growth forest, which takes up to 2-3 centuries. He expressed concern that the new Planning Rule will eliminate management indicator species, which are essential to determining whether adequate management is taking place for habitat and wildlife viability. He is also concerned about the scale of lands that are affected by the section of the Farm Bill that allows the governor of Alaska to select lands for treatment of forest infestations, such as insects.

Malena Marvin, Executive Director of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), addressed some concerns that arose during the meeting. From the perspective of SEACC, beach buffers and OGRs should not be part of a working forest; they were established based on scientific conclusions and should not be subject to logging. If the TAC is to recommend changes to the standards and guidelines for these areas, she urged them to review the science adequately first, particularly in regards to the conservation strategy. As a local resident, Malena is heavily invested in the viability of the region for all industries. Her partner is a commercial fisherman, so the health of the sea and the productivity of salmon are extremely important to them. As a self-made businessman, he believes that any business able to receive a loan and make something viable in the Tongass should have that option, but he was able to achieve what he has without any “handouts.” Regarding old growth bridge timber, she expressed the desire to transition away from old growth immediately. Specifically she referenced Viking Lumber and they fact that they expressed they do not want to transition, but rather prefer more old growth. She is confused about why expenses are being incurred and divisions are happening for a company that is not willing to make the transition.

Malena reviewed a resolution from the City of Tenakee Springs that urges the TAC to consider recommendations that address the following:

- Advance collaborative local management;
- Initiate an immediate transition from old growth;
- Remove barriers for regional marketing and value-added products;
- Prioritize the primary economic drivers of fishing and visitor industries;
- End export and achieve 100% local processing;
- Prioritize science-based management for wildlife and subsistence; and
- Create a carbon task force.¹⁴

¹⁴ A copy of the City of Tenakee Springs Resolution is available online with the November public comments, [here](#).

She also received letters from a diverse group of people that have new ideas that directly relate to the issues in front of the TAC.¹⁵ These ideas are based on common sense economic reasoning from local people that are making a living off of the landscape.

Next Steps

The next TAC meeting will take place January 20-23, 2015 at the Aspen Suites Hotel in Juneau, beginning at 1:00pm on Tuesday, January 20, and concluding at 4:00pm Friday, January 23. The focus of the meeting will be to develop recommendations for the Plan Amendment.

Prior to the January meeting, the Where and How Work Groups will hold a combined work group call to discuss the outputs of the modeling exercises. In addition to the model runs, a subgroup of the Committee will develop and populate a grid that outlines young growth supply, and potential demand scenarios. This will serve as the basis for discussion on old growth bridge timber.

The FS will hold three public open houses in Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan in January and February 2015 as part of the public participation process. The specific dates, times, and locations will be posted online and published in the Federal Register.

Reflections on the Meeting

Key Messages

The TAC identified the following key messages that will serve as talking points for media, as well as the basis of a press release to be finalized by the co-chairs in cooperation with the staff. The press release with the finalized key messages is available online, [here](#).

1. The TAC held its fourth meeting from November 19-21 in Sitka at the Sheet'ka Kwaán Naa Kahídi Community House. The committee wishes to thank the Sitka Tribe for hosting the group in its beautiful facility.
2. The TAC heard updates on projects and initiatives implemented to date as part of the young growth transition, as well as the process for developing alternatives for the Tongass Land Management Plan amendment. Working groups presented their work products and the plenary group reviewed initial findings.

¹⁵ These letters are available online with the November public comment, [here](#).

3. Senior leadership visited with the committee, including USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment Robert Bonnie, Alaska Regional Forester Beth Pendleton, and Tongass National Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole. Members communicated the need for the FS to not only amend the forest plan, but to utilize principles such as innovation, creativity, transparency, and risk for future forest management. The committee appreciates leadership's candor; their expressed support for the committee's recommendations should they come to agreement; and in particular thanks the undersecretary for traveling to Sitka in spite of Juneau's fog.
4. Members identified areas of common understanding including the need for a continued supply of old growth for future niche markets; a predictable supply of young growth timber going forward; and the need to preserve the infrastructure and expertise appropriate to the pace and scale of implementation of the forest plan amendment.
5. The committee developed a purpose and need statement for consideration by the plan amendment interdisciplinary team. They also drafted initial ideas regarding exceptions for the CMAI in order to bring more young growth timber into solution.
6. The committee appreciates the robust public comment both in person and in writing, and clearly heard the interest to consider resources and values beyond timber.
7. In spite of the longstanding challenge of timber in Southeast Alaska, the TAC had a pragmatic, civil and productive discussion on old growth. Members are dedicated and optimistic, but aware of the magnitude of the task at hand in order to achieve recommendations by January. To help meet this challenge, they developed assumptions for young growth volume projections to inform discussion at the next meeting.

Member Reflections

At the close of the meeting, TAC members and alternates shared individual reflections about the meeting. Their comments reflected the following themes:

- Appreciation for the honesty, hard work, dedication, and contributions to date.
- Recognition that even though the tough issues are coming out, the group is still working well together. The meeting brought members out of their comfort zones, but this will need to be stretched even further at the next meeting.
- Concern about transparency from the FS, because of recent changes in the timeline and process for handing-off the TAC's recommendations to the IDT, and its alteration in plans for considering an overlay LUD.
- Recognition that the public comments at this meeting addressed other resource uses and user groups besides the timber industry, which generally contrasted from public input on Prince of Wales Island.

- A sense of urgency regarding the TAC's work, and recognition that the impacts of the transition will be felt immediately by local businesses, and that industry, communities, and the long-term prosperity of the region as a whole are at stake.
- Need to stay within the charter and framework put forward with the Secretary's memo in order to achieve recommendations within the specified timeframe.
- An optimistic outlook and responsibility to give hope to the communities and future generations.
- Thanks to the Sitka tribe for hosting at their facility.
- Nervousness about the next meeting and all that needs to be accomplished and the big decisions that need to be made.
- Recognition that although other resource uses need to be considered, the portion of the Tongass dedicated to timber development is very small in comparison to the rest of the Forest.

Appendix A – Participant List

Committee Members in Attendance

Jaeleen Araujo
Les Cronk
Kirk Hardcastle
Chris Maisch
Brian McNitt
Eric Nichols
Keith Rush
Carol Rushmore
Erin Steinkruger
Andrew Thoms
Woody Widmark
Wade Zammit

Committee Members in Virtual Attendance (Phone)

Lynn Jungwirth
(*Partial attendance*)

Absent Members

Wayne Benner
Richard Peterson

Alternates in Virtual Attendance (Phone)

Jason Custer

Absent Alternates

Robert Mills
Chris Rose
Kate Troll

Committee Staff (USFS/Facilitators)

Jason Anderson
Karen Hardigg
Connie Lewis
Diana Portner

USDA/USFS Employees

Brie Darr
Sue Detwiler
Perry Edwards
Nicole Grewe
Pat Heuer
Karen Iwamoto
KK Prussian
Carol Seitz-Warmuth

USDA/USFS Contractors (Tetra Tech)

Dave Cox
Randy Fairbanks

Members of the Public¹⁶

Lucas (Luke) A'Bear
Marian Allen
David Beebe
Mike Belitz
Bert Bergman
Christopher Brewton
Marlene Campbell
Peter Chaille
John Daly
Melissa Dinsmore
Larry Edwards
Bethany Goodrich
Hannah Guggenheim
Joel Hanson
Scott Harris
Michael (Mike) Hicks
Rebecca Knight
Sarah Komisar
Malena Marvin
Erin McLarnon
Sophie Nethercut
Paul Olson
Keith Perkins
Rachel Waldholz
Garry White
Mary Wood

¹⁶ This list is based on members of the public that signed in at the beginning of each meeting day.

Appendix B – Draft Talking Points for Under Secretary Robert Bonnie

*Draft Key Concepts and Sure Steps
Implementation Working Group
Tongass Advisory Committee*

These recommended implementation concepts and action items are presented as a reflection of the Committee’s shared learning between August and November, 2014. This action agenda, coupled with ongoing effectiveness monitoring, is an opportunity for the Committee and the agency to share in a timely way ownership of innovative choices in policy and practice that support the Committee’s vision 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.”

The Committee has identified five key strategy concepts: flexibility, transparency, creativity, innovation, and risk. We suggest one or more “sure steps” in association with each concept, implementation actions that should be taken to help communities that rely on the Forest to thrive. In April, 2015 we will recommend additional “sure steps” as we find necessary.

Flexibility

The committee asks that the agency support and facilitate flexibility in rules and regulations to seize opportunities associated with the transition, recognizing that increased flexibility can also mean increased risk. Increasing use of public private partnerships to leverage funding and services, adjusting staff time and training, accelerating or decelerating project planning and implementation in response to changing conditions, and other approaches and actions are key to a balanced path forward for our forest-dependent economy.

Sure step:

- ❖ Expand the POW roadside EA (microsale program?) from 800ft to 1,200 ft. Consider expanding this opportunity to other districts.

Transparency

High levels of transparency are essential to communities’ social and economic well-being. Clarity around bid solicitation and ranking, performance evaluation, and other facets of implementation build both perceived and actual reliability into the agency’s good work supplying timber. Appropriate and timely communications with partners, stakeholders, and the public, as well as the step-by-step engagement called for in the 2012 planning rule, will help articulate and drive toward shared outcomes.

Sure steps:

- ❖ Include a partner on each IRTC or IRSC technical review/ranking team on the forest, and facilitate communication between partners active in different reviews at any given time.
- ❖ Append Big Thorne contracts to include a multi-party monitoring arrangement for stewardship components, including an integrated feedback loop linked to IRTCs and IRSCs planned and implemented in the future.

Creativity

Creative and adaptive policy and practice are particularly important in a time of transition. As operators, contractors, and secondary and tertiary businesses adjust and science around restoration and stewardship becomes more robust, it is our job to respond to needs on the ground. The agency should rely increasingly on community-based partners and stakeholders to lead and support creative work by building social agreement, facilitating collaborative processes across jurisdictions, and anchoring projects in local benefits.

Sure steps:

- ❖ Support agency staff in developing existing and establishing new agreements that support capacity building and community based organizations and leverage committed resources toward shared outcomes.
- ❖ Expand the articulation of the service component or service elements in stewardship contracts. Communicate this expanded articulation to contracting officers, resource staff, partners, and stakeholders to knit together planning strategy and project implementation.

Innovation

Innovation both internal and external to the agency is essential for an effective, bridged transition to a Tongass timber program composed predominantly of young growth. While it is essential to note that no one size fits all, useful lessons about the construction and maintenance of flexible organizational, social, and economic structures may be learned from other forests. Innovation may include a new look at appraisal systems, scaling, and other sale-related processes. Based on the committee's key take-homes from Thorne Bay and Klawock as well as members' background and experience, it also includes intra-agency pathways of communication in support of operators.

Sure steps:

- ❖ Build and institutionalize open lines of communication between transportation managers, roads engineers, and timber managers to support small operators' access to timber over time.
- ❖ Evaluate the appropriateness of the residual value appraisal system for integrated resource, mixed product, and/or majority or full young growth sales.

Risk

Agency, operators, and partners are positioned to consider accepting new types of risk in association with the transition to a predominantly young growth timber base. However, the committee heard first-hand in Thorne Bay that mills with capacities from .2 to 1.5mbf per year have bid a higher price per board foot than larger operators, carry larger bonds, and take on other risks not associated with contracts won by larger operators. In 2011, smaller operators nonetheless carried more than 1/3 of the timber volume under contract on the forest. By assuming additional risk (without assuming additional cost), the agency can lower barriers to these and new smaller operators as they test new product types and markets.

Sure step:

- ❖ At project level, consider decreasing risk to operators on young growth sale by decreasing the amount of or removing requirements for bid and performance bonding.