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To: Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest

On July 15, 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the new *Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy* (SASS) to help support a diverse economy, enhance community resilience, and conserve natural resources in Southeast Alaska. One of the four primary components of the strategy is ending large-scale, old-growth timber harvest on the Tongass National Forest and focusing resources to support forest restoration, recreation, climate resilience, and sustainable young-growth forest management. Last fall, a group of Alaska Region and Tongass National Forest staff developed *SASS-Forest Management*, a strategy based on the management direction in the 2016 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan that describes an integrated vision for forest management in the spirit of the SASS. I am confident that this strategy will be able to guide project development at the field level and articulate our intent for forest management within and beyond the agency.

While *SASS Forest Management* provides many of the building blocks for integrating forest management projects, I want to emphasize the strategic outcomes that we expect. This strategy addresses not only economic outcomes expected from integrated restoration and forest management, but also the benefits to local communities and ecological systems. Already we are leveraging SASS investment projects such as the Klawock Indigenous Steward Forest Partnership and All Landowners Group & Young-growth Working Forest Analysis to contribute to a robust local workforce, strengthen partnerships, and invest in economic opportunities while improving ecological conditions and watershed health. SASS investments like these, focused on watershed and habitat restoration and young-growth forest industry, will kick-start our re-focus from a singular objective of timber management to integrated management actions that address multiple objectives such as vegetation management, watershed restoration, and ecosystem resilience.

SASS Forest Management describes how we plan to shift to a more integrated forest management program through priority projects, partnerships, workforce development, infrastructure, and investments. In addition to using SASS investment opportunities to begin implementation, the Alaska Region and Tongass National Forest will leverage funding opportunities from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. During the 2022 field season, we will target known and urgent restoration needs for implementation projects and continue to develop partnership opportunities through agreements and stewardship contracts. We will work with the State of Alaska, industry partners such as the Alaska Forest Association, conservation partners, Tribal Nations, Alaska Native Corporations, and other landowners to prepare 10-year all-landowner project plans for restoration and timber harvest, with areas of multiple needs and benefits identified and prioritized.



Perhaps most importantly, SASS emphasizes partnerships, collaboration, and Tribal engagement. As we move forward with project development, we are dedicated to working with all landowners on a comprehensive plan to integrate forest management with the socioeconomic needs of Southeast Alaska. SASS investments have funded opportunities to re-engage the Tongass Transition Collaborative and, if awarded, a grant from the Economic Development Administration would fund advancement of a Southeast Alaska Sustainable Forest Products Cluster led by Spruce Root. The Forest Service will engage in meaningful consultation with Tribal Nations to ensure that forest management initiatives meet Tribal needs for community and cultural benefits.

I am inspired by the work ahead. Please refer to *SASS Forest Management*, attached here, as our initial strategy for integrated forest management and the re-focus from old-growth timber harvest to restoration, recreation, climate resilience, and sustainable young-growth management.



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Enclosure(s): 1

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