

# Tongass Transition Collaborative: The Path Forward

## Summary, February 7, 2023

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### Identifying Steps Toward Progress

During the December 15-16, 2022 meeting of the Tongass Transition Collaborative (TTC), the group discussed opportunities to address barriers to progress to young growth management on the Tongass National Forest. The suggestions were identified in response to evaluation of progress toward meeting young growth goals outlined in the 2016 Tongass Land Management Plan Amendment.

The members underwent a “sticky-note” exercise in which they were asked to identify suggestions for concrete steps to address challenges that have impeded progress to date and take advantage of opportunities that exist for future progress. The suggestions they generated were grouped into several categories and then further consolidated for purposes of creating work groups.

### Working Groups

The purpose of convening working groups (subsets of TTC members) is to develop strategies for how to improve young growth management and implementation for each category (outlined below). Specifically, each work group is being asked to:

1. Develop a work plan (e.g., a point person, working assignments, timeline, etc.).
2. Clarify and prioritize the suggestions/topics for which they would like to develop strategies.
3. Identify data and information needs.
4. Develop suggested strategies, including conclusions and recommendations for actionable next steps.

Work groups will achieve these steps through:

1. Participating in a series of calls of each work group to for organizing and deliberations.
2. Develop initial ideas and concepts by late February 2023.
3. Solicit feedback from the full TTC during an in-person meeting in late spring 2023.

*Note: These groups will not necessarily follow a consensus process. Informed input will be collected, compiled, and noted where there is agreement (and not).*

## Proposed Working Group Topics and Members

Following are the workgroups, categories, suggestions, and initial work group assignments that were derived from the exercise. Proposed members listed below are based on initial volunteers for each topic. We anticipate additional group members and/or changes in topics, as needed.<sup>1</sup> The suggestions and considerations listed below were not developed via consensus agreement; rather, they will serve as the starting point for work group deliberation. Some suggestions may be outside of the scope of the group (e.g., would require a Forest Plan Revision); some of these are identified in the section below, Topics for Later Consideration. In addition, some suggestions could have fit well under several categories and were assigned to what was deemed the best fit. Some topics had more detail than others; in some cases, the notes were difficult to discern and may need further clarification.

### WORKGROUP 1: MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS AND INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

Proposed Members: Michael Kampnich, Austin Williams, and Jeff Hermanns

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Integrated Resource Management</b>	Management approaches need to be looking forward with the commitment/focus of returning our forests to old growth conditions. Fish, wildlife and all other needs and expectations from the forest can be achieved through this approach.
	Prioritize management for fish/wildlife (commercial logging as a secondary focus).
	Plan/design projects to meet a variety of goals and balance multiple values/uses, including wildlife/fish habitat, recreation, subsistence, resilience, etc. (i.e., integrated management).
	Manage cedar for cultural use (e.g., re-planting, thinning, longer rotations)
	Conduct thinning / PCT
	Use harvest methods at an economically meaningful scale
	Focus on sustainability
	Integrated management is the goal of SASS-fm
<b>NEPA</b>	Adaptation based on science (e.g., soil science)
	Streamline NEPA / pre-NEPA Recognize that industry is impacted by outcomes of the NEPA process and may need to adapt approaches/prescriptions to align

<sup>1</sup> At the time of this summary, Robert Venables, Mike Douville, Les Cronk, Ian Johnson, and Chelsey Okonek had not yet chosen a group.

## WORKGROUP 2: YOUNG GROWTH PRODUCTS AND MARKETS

Proposed Members: Gordon Chew and Austin Otos

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Products</b>	Identify / develop economically sound products
	Recognize the differences between young growth and old growth products/uses (e.g., species differences are important in old growth, but young growth will be a commodity market regardless of species)
	Provide small logs to small mills
	Create a regionally based, value added market
	Ensure cultural traditional uses are included/prioritized

## WORKGROUP 3: SUPPLY, INVESTMENTS, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Proposed Members: Steve Connelly, Julia Nave, and Eric Nichols

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Supply</b>	Identify barriers to supply
	Develop a long-term strategic plan for supply, including cut prescriptions, sale schedule, and NEPA-cleared volume
	Study and coordinate with other landowners to determine sustained yield, recognizing current realities and future projections (e.g., lack of available young growth now, but projected in the future)
	Identify and create a dedicated land base for timber (Note: this was identified as “the single biggest barrier to supply”) <sup>2</sup>
	Address litigation barriers
	Establish an annual allowable cut / projected wood/timber sale quantity that cannot be politically changed
Facilitate a common understanding of operability and economics of sales and projects	

<sup>2</sup> If this suggestion is proposing a change in Land Use Designations, it would require a Plan Revision.

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Investments</b>	Invest in a restoration economy as the bridge to young growth (i.e., subsidized management/restoration in the near-term until young growth reaches harvest age)
	Coordinate joint advocacy for USDA investments across forest/land ownerships for on-the-ground projects
	Organize by the four categories of SASS (forest management, investments, Roadless Rule, Tribal consultation)
	Subsidies will need to be part of the investment picture
<b>Workforce Development</b>	Provide support for workforce development
	Recognize the lack of interest among incoming workforce to pursue forest/timber jobs (e.g., most/all of the next generation do not want to be loggers)
	Utilize local community forest partnerships as supplemental workforce

**WORKGROUP 4: METRICS AND DATA**

Proposed Members: Tessa Axelson and Brian Kleinhenz

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Metrics</b>	Modernize USFS metrics of success
	Create a common understanding of “success” (e.g., how to define a “healthy forest”)
	Continue inventory collection/analysis
<b>Data</b>	Complete and update survey work in young growth stands (prior to timber sales)
	Research/collect data on operability and economics

## WORKGROUP 5: COMMUNITY-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND EDUCATION

Proposed Members: Quinn Aboudara, Jill Weitz, Dennis Nickerson, Jason Gubatayao, Bob Christensen, and Andrew Thoms

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS / CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Coordination and Capacity-Building</b>	Create young growth coordinator positions to facilitate young growth projects within communities. Suggestions for the position: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host external to the agency or as a shared Forest Service position</li> <li>• Coordinate/communicate local demand and connect with local supply</li> <li>• Understand agency processes, have connections in community, and be able to communicate with industry</li> </ul>
	Capacity building for small local mills/operators
<b>Community Engagement / Collaboration</b>	Conduct community engagement so the process is led by communities, not agencies
	Prioritize community needs over industry wants
	Create public support to combat national politics
<b>Education</b>	Stabilize, empower, and nurture the TTC
	Conduct outreach/education (directed at different audiences) about young growth and the impacts to fish and wildlife
	Communicate what is happening on-the-ground with legislators and other leadership

## Topics for Later Consideration

Some suggestions were oriented specifically toward a Forest Plan Revision and/or implementation of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS). A Forest Plan Revision likely encompasses many suggestions (i.e., an overall umbrella) whereas SASS can serve as an organizing framework for implementation (i.e., forest management, investments, the Roadless Rule, and Tribal consultation). Specific suggestions and considerations included:

- Review and revise the Forest Plan to reflect current needs and practices, and to reflect long-term management planning (“this is a new forest; we need a new game”)
- Create a young growth plan “by the people” (i.e., remove national-level politics and corporate interests)
- Author and honor a new Forest Plan that withstands changes in political priorities / representatives (i.e., implement the Plan consistently, regardless of Administration changes)
- Each of the topics included in this document can inform what a new Plan can include and/or how SASS could be implemented.