

Tongass Futures Roundtable

A collaborative effort of stakeholders to address public policy issues of the Tongass National Forest and Southeast Alaska



416 Harris St., Suite 301
Juneau, AK 99801

May 23, 2011

Dear Governor Parnell:

At its meeting last week in Hydaburg, the Tongass Futures Roundtable heard from your representative, Clarence Clark, who ably described your decision to withdraw the State's participation because of the Roundtable's perceived inability to resolve the timber supply issues facing the Tongass.

The Roundtable understands, but disagrees with, your decision. There are two reasons for this. Our first is founded on our observation that the Roundtable has led to material improvement in the relationship between the Forest Service, the State, its various agencies, and stakeholders who have interests in forest management, timber harvesting, and Tongass Land Management Plan implementation. These relationships should not be overlooked. After decades of fighting and an utter absence of meaningful dialogue, the right parties are now engaging each other.

Our second reason for taking exception to your decision is that the Roundtable has always been about more than just timber, as important as it is. The Roundtable has given voice to many rural residents, tribes, and communities. We have learned of their plight, can see the devastating community desperation over declining jobs, outmigration, and lack of a future for their youth. In its sovereign role, the State would clearly benefit by being at the table with other stakeholders to hear these concerns and work collaboratively to develop training programs, new business initiatives, recapture rural fishing fleets, and other opportunities that go beyond timber.


This was particularly evident at our Hydaburg meeting last week, during which Prince of Wales residents were able to describe their desire to learn more about mining, interest in forest stewardship and restoration, the need to recover the fishing fleets that were once the economic stalwarts of their communities, and what support they can be expected from the State (e.g. mining training and small business assistance).

Nevertheless, we recognize that you intend to concentrate your efforts to promote a more robust timber products industry through your Timber Task Force. As the Task Force's efforts take shape, we commit to good faith discussion of matters of common interest that may arise. In doing so, we ask that you recognize that the Timber Task Force initiative does not diminish the importance of the myriad challenges weighing on Southeast Alaskans, especially in our smallest communities.

The 19 members of the Roundtable, spurred by the community encouragement we received, were unanimous in the view that it remains an invaluable forum of stakeholders who hold diverse views, but are united in their commitment to achieve a long-term balance of healthy and diverse communities and vibrant economies, consistent with our values and the ecological integrity of region.

Its final action in Hydaburg was to request that the State of Alaska reconsider its decision to withdraw from the Roundtable. I look forward to discussing this matter with you at your convenience.

THE TONGASS FUTURES ROUNDTABLE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Botelho". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bruce" being more prominent than the last name "Botelho".

By: Bruce Botelho