

To: Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Mark Begich
Congressman Don Young
USDA Undersecretary Homer Wilkes
USDA Assistant Undersecretary Jay Jensen
Forest Service Chief Abigail Kimbell
Alaska Regional Forester Dennis Bschor
Tongass National Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole

The Tongass Futures Roundtable brings together a diverse group of stakeholders long involved in the Tongass to discuss how to incorporate our economic, cultural, and ecological values in public policy issues throughout the region. The Roundtable seeks to explore how a broad range of stakeholders can address these public policy issues and work together to achieve a long-term balance of healthy and diverse communities, vibrant economies, responsible use of resources -including timber, while maintaining the natural values and ecological integrity of the forest.

Key to achieving these purposes is a healthy forest. The authority granted to the Forest Service to implement stewardship contracts for forest restoration work is an excellent and appropriate method for improving forest health, while creating and sustaining jobs in local communities. In Southeast Alaska, there are thousands of acres, which are in need of forest restoration. There also is a great deal of interest in the region's communities to participate in collaborative stewardship planning efforts leading to long-term stewardship contracts that will provide the continuity necessary for local businesses to be able to undertake the restoration and forest management stewardship work in the challenging conditions of Southeast Alaska.

The Tongass Futures Roundtable wishes to express its support for adequate funding for the ranger districts in the Tongass to support the collaborative planning efforts, increased Forest Service capacity for contracting, and implementation of stewardship contracts. Be assured, the region is working hard to create new products and new markets to increase the value of the wood products that will be harvested through these restoration projects in order to offset the cost of the stewardship projects. However, these efforts will take time to develop and we need to act now in order to retain our existing infrastructure and develop the new capacity needed for restoration projects.

In closing, we appreciate your efforts in supporting increased collaborative stewardship and stewardship contracting.

Adopted by the Tongass Futures Roundtable on May 22, 2009