

## Background

The Starrigavan River watershed was harvested by clearcutting in the early 1970s. Today there are approximately 700 acres of overstocked young-growth stands in the watershed on both Forest Service and State of Alaska lands. The area is now characterized by second growth forest composed of Sitka spruce, western hemlock and red alder in the stem exclusion stage. The purpose of this project is to improve watershed function and to enhance fish and wildlife habitat values by thinning riparian tree stands. Thinning can improve diameter growth of residual trees and promote understory vegetation development. Thinning prescriptions were developed to maintain or accelerate diameter growth of residual trees; enhance quantity and quality of understory vegetation and provide travel corridors for wildlife; and accelerate the forest toward productive old growth conditions.

## Outcomes

- Over 70 acres of riparian stands have been thinned and an additional 100 acres of riparian areas will be thinned in the near future. Tree spacing will be approximately 14 to 18 feet after treatment.
- Slash treatments (i.e. bucking and piling) have been implemented in portions of the project area to provide connectivity to existing productive old growth habitat for wildlife.
- To further reduce slash from thinning treatments, thinned trees adjacent to the existing road and trails have been or will be removed by private individuals for firewood or other uses.
- Approximately 70 trees (conifers) were removed to be used in a demonstration project on the use of second growth timber. These selected trees will be used to construct a recreation cabin within the USFS Starrigavan campground that meets ADA accessibility standards.

**Successes** The project provided community benefits by creating employment opportunities for local contractors, recreation opportunities for residents and visitors through a public-use cabin, and educational opportunities by having the cabin be built as part a University of Alaska class. The project also applied creative solutions to funding by demonstrating how restoration efforts can provide 2nd-growth forest products, and by reducing the costs of thinning and slash removal by having local citizens remove some of the slash for firewood.

**Timeline** May 2004—Present (ongoing)

**Future Work** Additional acres will be thinned on an ongoing basis

**Details** Project coordinator: US Forest Service; Funding: USFS Watershed Program Funds; Business contractors: USFS crews and local individuals.



*Forest before thinning*



*After thinning*



*Cabin log loading*