

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

RESOLUTION 2010-18

Whereas, Sitka, Alaska is a community that is completely surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, which is a part of the United States Department of Agriculture, and;

Whereas, Sitka, Alaska has a long social, cultural, and economic history characterized by a dependence on the natural resources of the Tongass, which currently provide Sitka with quality of life amenities, tourism and recreation, salmon and other fisheries resources, hydro-electric energy, customary, traditional, and subsistence resources, silvicultural resources including commercial timber, personal use timber and firewood, Wilderness resources, and many other uses both quantifiable and un-quantifiable, and;

Whereas, Sitka's immediate and long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability is dependent on the wise management of the natural resources of the Tongass, which are in the hands of the land managers employed by the USFS and other entities, which represent a great deal of capacity and expertise within the community of Sitka, and;

Whereas, the Department of Agriculture has recently outlined a "transition vision framework" for the Tongass which will "focus on a broader suite of opportunities the Tongass can provide to support a diversified economy in Southeast Alaska" by "providing jobs around renewable energy, forest restoration, timber, tourism, subsistence, and fisheries and mariculture," and by "promot[ing] small business creation, expansion and retention; improv[ing] access to capital; creat[ing] quality jobs and sustainable economic growth; promot[ing] job training and educational opportunities; and maximiz[ing] a forest restoration economy and by-product use," and;

Whereas, Sitka, Alaska currently has a diversified economy whose success requires constant effort including continued investment, addition of value to resources, marketing of products/services, training and educational opportunities, and further diversification for guaranteed resilience, and;

Whereas, the vision outlined by Regional Forester Beth Pendleton outlines management and investments that could offer economic development opportunities for Sitka, Alaska while also conserving the natural resources that Sitka depends upon, therefore be it resolved that

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Sitka supports the transition framework outlined by the Regional Forester and is eager to hear from the Regional Forester about how various entities within the Department of Agriculture—including Rural Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Forest Service Regional, Tongass Supervisor's Office, and Local

District partners—will work with the City and Borough of Sitka, Sitka businesses, and Sitka community stakeholders to implement projects and initiatives that fit this vision.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska on this 13th day of July, 2010.

Scott McAdams, Mayor

ATTEST:

Colleen Ingman, MMC
Municipal Clerk

MEMO

To: Mayor McAdams and Assembly Members
From: Zia Brucaya, Sitka Conservation Society Intern
Date: July 7, 2010
Subject: USDA Transition Framework for Southeast Alaska

Background

Last fall, USDA Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack unveiled a new vision for national forest management focused on conservation, restoration, and collaboration between a wide range of public and private stakeholders. He highlighted the importance of protecting roadless areas and integrating “forest restoration, climate resilience, watershed protection, wildlife conservation, the need for vibrant local economies, and collaboration into how we manage our National Forests.”

In order to achieve this vision in Southeast Alaska, the Forest Service and Rural Development are developing a Transition Framework for shifting Tongass management away from its historically old growth, timber-centric orientation, toward a young growth strategy that emphasizes a diverse resource management approach in which timber is but one part. This vital policy shift recognizes that timber is no longer a viable platform for the region’s economy, and that communities like Sitka depend on the careful management of *all* of the resources of the Tongass.

The Transition Framework is important because it aligns Tongass management with the needs of the region today, and it will allow Sitka to step forward as a regional leader and national example of local solutions for economic diversity. Sitka currently has a diverse economy that includes each element advocated by the Framework (fisheries, renewable energy, forest restoration, tourism, subsistence, etc.); by supporting the Framework and ensuring that the process effectively addresses Sitka’s needs and assets, the City can catalyze this base into even more jobs and natural resource assets, a greater quality of life, and increased economic stability.

Key Information About the Transition Framework

The Transition Framework currently being developed will “*support sustainable diversified economies for Southeast Alaska communities around forest restoration, renewable energy, fisheries and mariculture, subsistence, and tourism and recreation, while sustaining and transitioning a viable timber economy.*”

Regional Forester Beth Pendleton writes that, “Efforts will focus on creating restoration based jobs, restoring fish and deer habitat to support the fishing industry and subsistence users, and examining energy projects, including small hydroelectric projects and bioenergy, to provide lower cost energy and bring down the costs of doing business in southeast Alaska. We will also

invest in facilities, trails, and other activities to attract increased recreation and tourism use and jobs.”

The Framework will involve shifting towards long-term stewardship contracts and young growth management, and away from timber harvesting in roadless areas and old-growth forests. It will be completed in four phases over two years. Near term actions include:

- Planning for three long-term stewardship contracts;
- coordinating a young growth survey on the Tongass;
- identifying “low-hanging fruit” projects that could be initiated right away;
- coordinating a Stewardship Workshop for local community members, potential operators, and federal employees and partners; and
- mapping “linkages” between projects that could work together as a package.

Through the Framework, the Forest Service ultimately plans to:

- Promote small business creation, expansion and retention;
- improve access to capital;
- create quality jobs and sustainable economic growth;
- promote job training and educational opportunities; and
- maximize a forest restoration economy and by-product use.

Recommendations

Based on the above information, it is clear that the Transition Framework offers a host of potential benefits for the economic, social and environmental longevity of Sitka. It is important that the City come out strongly in favor of the Framework to 1) demonstrate the City’s excitement about and watchfulness of this visionary new policy, and 2) demonstrate the City’s commitment to facilitating the goals of the Framework and capturing their potential benefits.

The adoption of the resolution in support of the Transition Framework currently before the Assembly is an important first step. This show of support will give the Forest Service useful backup to effectively pursue the goals of the Framework, which in many cases are contrary to what has been standard Tongass management practice for decades. It will also position Sitka as an active and aware stakeholder that is invested in the progress and outcomes of the transition.

Beyond municipal adoption of this resolution and a commitment to positioning Sitka as a leader during the transition, the City should continue to pursue every opportunity to maximize the potential benefits of the Transition Framework for Sitka. The Sitka Conservation Society is currently working to identify areas for improvement as the transition progresses, from missing resources, to ineffective channels of communication, and will continue to work with the City, the Forest Service, and other local stakeholders to find ways to address these needs.

Additional Information

- Regional Forester Beth Pendleton’s letter to the Tongass Futures Roundtable, available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/ro/projects-plans/transition_frame/index.shtml.
- Becky Nourse, Acting Deputy Regional Forester, Alaska Region, (907) 228.6326.
- Beth Pendleton, Regional Forester, Alaska Region, (907) 586.8863.