Thomas Bay Stewardship Proposal

The Petersburg Ranger District is interested in using stewardship contracting as a tool to achieve the objectives identified in the Thomas Bay Young-Growth Timber Sale decision. The district is outreaching to provide information and solicit letters of support from a broad spectrum of interests for the use of this tool. Stewardship contracting would allow for the bundling of identified activities (below) into one contract, which would enable the trade of goods (timber) for services.

More information on stewardship contracting is provided below, followed by details on the proposed projects.

Background

In February of this year, the Tongass National Forest authorized the implementation of Thomas Bay Young-Growth Timber Sale project on the Petersburg Ranger District. The project is intended to increase the viability of young-growth harvest and processing capacity for the benefit of local and regional economies while also addressing restoration needs in the area. The harvest of timber in the Thomas Bay project area has been designed to maintain forested connectivity throughout the project area while providing early seral forest habitat for the benefit of the area's deer and moose populations. Restoration or improvement needs identified to-date for the area include aquatic organism passage improvements along NFS roads, cleanup of abandoned hunting camps in the project area and thinning young-growth stands to improve riparian area function and wildlife habitat. These actions also align with the OneUSDA Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) by refocusing resources on the Tongass National Forest to implement an integrated forest management program that includes watershed and wildlife habitat restoration and sustainable young-growth timber harvest.

What is Stewardship Contracting?

Stewardship contracting is a tool to help achieve land management goals while meeting local and rural community needs, including contributing to the sustainability of rural communities and providing a continuing source of local income and employment. It focuses on the "end result" ecosystem benefits and outcomes, rather than on what is removed from the land. Stewardship contracting can combine work items, when appropriate, to capitalize on efficient use of equipment, supplies, and people to obtain maximum value for the public and benefit a variety of resources.

Key stewardship goals included in this proposal:

- Improve, maintain and restore forest health

- Restore/maintain water quality
- Improve fish/wildlife habitat

How Does it Work?

When the Forest Service trades goods for services, most projects are incorporated into a single Integrated Resource Contract (IRC). An IRC includes forest product removal (goods) and restoration projects (services). The costs of the services are offset by the value of the goods. One contractor is responsible for completing all work. The contractor may use subcontractors. The Forest Service solicits proposals from individuals and groups to accomplish land management goals. The quality of a proposal, expertise, and past performance of a contractor, as well as price, are key factors in awarding a contract or entering into an agreement on a Best Value basis.

How Can Funds be Spent?

The exchange of goods for services must implement on-the-ground projects that meet restoration objectives, such as removing vegetation to promote healthy forests, restoring watershed areas, and restoring wildlife and fish habitat. In cases where the *value of the goods is greater than the costs of the services*, the Forest Service collects and retains the excess receipts. These retained receipts may be used to implement other stewardship contracts/agreements. In cases where the *value of the goods is less than the costs of the services*, the Forest Service uses a combination of timber value, appropriated funds, or retained receipts to pay for the service work.

Stewardship contracting funds may not be spent on such things as Forest Service overhead and salaries, construction of administrative or major developed recreation facilities, research, and land acquisition.

What are the Next Steps for the Thomas Bay Project?

The Petersburg District Ranger will submit a written stewardship proposal to the Tongass Forest Supervisor, who will coordinate with the Alaska Regional Forester for project approval.

What Can You Do to Help?

A component of using this mechanism - *applying timber value received from the sale of young-growth timber to pay for the service work needed to meet the restoration objectives of the project* - is receiving support from our partners (you!). If you agree that stewardship contracting is an appropriate mechanism to accomplish the projects outlined below, please let us know by sending a letter of support to the Petersburg District Ranger for project approval (we have attached a template to help you get started).

We have outlined activities proposed for stewardship contracting below. We ask that you review these and let us know in your letter which ones align with the core values of your organization. Also, we would like to know if there are additional activities in the Thomas Bay area that the Forest Service should include in our stewardship proposal.

Proposed Work Activities

The draft stewardship proposal currently includes the following activities.

1. Young-growth harvest to support employment and provide forest products to the young-growth timber industry for the benefit of local and regional economies

Harvest of 536 acres, totaling approximately 14.8 million board feet of young-growth timber. Harvest is designed to maintain at least 50 percent of the original stand acres with harvest openings ranging in size from 2 acres to 30 acres. To access and remove the timber, about 0.2 mile of new temporary road construction, and about 3.3 miles of temporary road construction on decommissioned road prism would be included. Logs would be hauled to the Thomas Bay marine access facility and transported by barge to a location approved in the project contract.

2. Remove temporary road prism to restore fish access and reestablish downstream flow

Use heavy equipment to remove a dike on Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC) stream #108-60-10025 in harvest unit 18 that blocks coho salmon and Dolly Varden char from upstream migration for approximately 400 feet during low stream flows. To ensure fish passage during timber harvest activities, the contractor would install a temporary culvert at the stream intersection before removing the dike. Next, an excavator would fill the bottom of the dike with streambed material, placed to match the natural slope of the stream (less than 1 percent) and designed for a 100-year flood event. After harvest activities are complete, the contractor would remove the culvert and dike to restore fish access, and recontour the slopes to reestablish downstream flow.

If the dike is removed, coho habitat would increase by approximately 400 feet which would improve upstream aquatics and essential fish habitat (EFH) in stream #108-60-10025 and reestablish its downstream flow.

3. Unplug culvert and install beaver analog to reduce sedimentation and improve water quality

Use heavy equipment to clear woody debris that originated from a beaver dam from a culvert on AWC stream #108-60-10030-2011-3020 at milepost 5.52 on NFS road 6256.

Clearing the culvert and installing a beaver analog, a human-made structure built with natural materials to mimic the natural processes a beaver dam maintains, would improve stream flow and reduce stream sedimentation on an EFH stream.

4. Remove debris from abandoned hunting camps on National Forest System lands to improve forest ecosystem health and the restore the natural appearance of the landscape

When Unit 14 is harvested, use heavy equipment to remove deteriorating hunting camps from the project area. Abandoned waste can contaminate soil and water sources, release toxic

substances that have long-term effects on ecosystem health and can harm wildlife if ingested. Additionally, the accumulation of waste negatively impacts the natural appearance of the area.

Removing garbage from abandoned hunting camps will improve ecosystem health and wildlife safety. It will also improve the natural appearance of the area.

5. Thin young-growth stands for wildlife and riparian habitat benefits

In the southeast portion of the project area along NFS road 6256 and the Muddy River, past harvest occurred in areas that are now stream buffers and off-limits for commercial timber harvest. This thinning would target young-growth stands within these riparian management areas that are over-grown and lacking understory that is important for deer and moose winter habitat. These stands could receive any combination of the following treatments depending on the existing stand characteristics and site conditions – selective cutting, girdling, and slash treatment.

Over time, these treatments will:

- Improve tree growth rates, quality, vigor, and composition to maintain or improve habitat for wildlife and fish.
- Maintain or increase understory biodiversity.
- Accelerate forest succession to achieve old-growth forest structural features.
- Improve or maintain the hydrologic function of riparian habitat.

6. Remediation of a log culvert near Thomas Bay Marine Transfer Facility (MTF) to maintain aquatic organism passage

Recent inspections have determined the existing log culvert on NFS road 6265 at milepost 0.161 has about 5 years before load reductions need to be applied. This structure is located on a critical route for hauling equipment and materials to and from the Thomas Bay marine transfer facility.

Removing the log culvert and replacing it with a permanent structure designed to pass aquatic organisms would ensure long-term benefits to aquatic and essential fish habitat (EFH) by maintaining salmonid connectivity to upstream habitat while maintaining an important access point to the Thomas Bay Road System.