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## **Sitka Conservation Society Announcement**

**Scaling local projects to achieve regional impact:** *Sitka Conservation Society receives grant that bolsters the Tongass People and Place program to study the impacts of Salmon Habitat Restoration Project*

**Sitka, Alaska:** Over the past 5 years in Sitka, the Sitka Conservation Society has developed partnerships in the Sitka community who work together on pro-active natural resource stewardship. This has included developing a program to implement and study the effects of projects that restore fish and wildlife habitat damaged from past logging practices, developing K-12 and university curriculum materials for teaching environmental science issues related to salmon habitat, and getting students and volunteers out in the field conducting ecological studies and collecting information that will be used by resource managers such as the US Forest Service.

Funding that has allowed us to develop these capacities include the People and Place program, the National Forest Foundation, and SCS membership dues. In recognition of successful outcomes on Sitka-based projects, SCS was recently solicited to develop a strategic partnership with the Tongass National Forest to bring these types of programs to communities on Prince of Wales Island. Funding will be provided by the National Forest Foundation. By building on pilot projects and leveraging funding sources, SCS and our partners will have the opportunity to bolster and enhance watershed and fisheries programs across Southeast Alaska, and integrate communities and stakeholders into the efforts all along the way. Other partners and participants will include the Universities of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and schools on Prince of Wales Island.

“This funding helps us take successful initiatives we have begun in Sitka to integrate stakeholders, community members, and students in Tongass Forest management to other communities and places on the Forest,” comments SCS executive director Andrew Thoms.

“This program gives us a chance to help catalyze, demonstrate and implement the management activities and focus that we want across the board on the Tongass while also informing the policy that helps chart a course for Tongass National Forest Management.”

The program on Prince of Wales will use a "Triple-Bottom-Line" approach to help build socially, economically, and environmentally resilient communities:

**Environment:** Working with the Tongass National Forest, we will operate a seasonal non-lethal trap to count and assess salmon smolt that are migrating out of the Twelvemile Creek Watershed on Prince of Wales Island follow a large scale restoration investment to restore critical spawning and rearing habitat conducted by the USFS Tongass National Forest, in partnership with The

Nature Conservancy and the National Forest Foundation. The restoration needed to be done because the habitat was negatively impacted by past logging activities. Collecting information on the outcomes of the restoration work is critical for evaluating the effectiveness of habitat restoration activities. This monitoring project will be an integral part of the Watershed Restoration Effectiveness Monitoring Program of the Tongass National Forest.

**Economic:** The Tongass National Forest produces an average of 28% of Alaska's annual commercial salmon harvest. Because salmon support 1 in 10 jobs in Southeast Alaska and create an economic impact of \$1 billion dollars in the regional economy, projects that protect and restore salmon runs are of critical importance to Southeast Alaska communities.

**Economic (part 2):** In partnership with the UAS Fisheries Technology Program, local youth will also have vocational training opportunities as interns working at the fish trap, along with receiving career and educational counseling from fisheries professionals - possibly leading to careers as resource managers in the backyards where they grew up.

**Social:** Teachers and students from Prince of Wales communities will take part in classroom-based Salmon Curriculum and outdoor-based Steam Team activities. Stream Team is a statewide program where students collect field data to assess water quality and stream health. Students will also get a chance to work alongside professional staff and resource managers which can provide mentoring opportunities.

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