

# TRACKS



Sitka Conservation Society Newsletter  
*Working to protect the natural environment of the Tongass and Sitka's quality of life--since 1967.*

SPRING

2011

## STARRIGAVAN WATERSHED RESTORATION | Benefits for Wildlife and Community

**By Andy Miller**

This spring, the Sitka Conservation Society will help improve wildlife habitat and provide local families with firewood, when it is involved in the removal of leftover slash from a second-growth thinning project in the Starrigavan watershed near Sitka.

The area had been clearcut in 1972, and was thinned in 2009 in an effort to improve plant growth and animal habitat. The thinning occurred on 72 acres, but funding was not available to remove the final 10 acres of slash. Slash, is the branches and debris left on the ground after logging. In some places, the slash is piled several feet high, making the area impassible for wildlife, especially Sitka Black-tailed Deer.

SCS obtained a National Forest Foundation habitat and restoration grant this year, which in part will be used to hire a local contractor to move the remaining slash to a nearby location where it can be better accessed by the public to take for firewood.



SCS is using the same grant to fund a forest restoration monitoring program involving Sitka High School students, and some of the grant funding will go to a University of Alaska Southeast field biology class being offered this summer.

Once the slash is removed, deer will be able to better access the parcel and plant growth in the area should improve. Prior to the thinning, the second growth had been so dense that very little was able to grow on the forest floor.

Aside from improving the habitat, SCS Restoration Coordinator Scott Harris said SCS is happy that the slash removal will play a small role in helping Sitkans reduce their carbon footprint. He explained that by heating their homes with local wood, instead of relying on imported heating oil, Sitkans can make a small difference.

# A WELCOME NEW DIRECTION ON THE TONGASS

By Marcel LaPerriere



As a custom builder in Sitka, I'd like to run my business using only local woods that come from the Tongass. Unfortunately, it's an impractical goal right now. The easiest way for me to get wood is to buy from Sitka's local lumber yard, which stocks only wood from the Lower 48 or Canada. I scratch my head and wonder why the local yard can not stock wood right from my backyard?

I will soon start work on a house that's built almost entirely with Tongass wood. It required me to make special arrangements months in advance with a mom-and-pop mill down in Wrangell. It's not easy to plan months before a project even starts, however both my client and I are committed to using local wood. It's good for the local economy and it can be done in a way that doesn't require wholesale clearcutting of old-growth, like we had when the region's two pulp mills were running full bore.

Those logging boom times are long gone, and they inflicted a lot of environmental damage that

needs to be repaired. By fixing that damage, and shifting to a second-growth timber supply, the Tongass can support local businesses like mine while ensuring that the wild and wonderful places that make the Tongass special are here for all future generations.

The U.S. Forest Service agrees. In May, the feds announced they would begin a transition away from logging in old-growth and roadless areas. Instead, they will concentrate on cutting timber from second-growth areas and restoring damage inflicted by decades of clearcutting from the pulp mill era.

I'm really encouraged to see the Forest Service moving in this direction with the Tongass. To make this transition succeed, though, will require more than just good intentions on the agency's part.

An industry that can do this new kind of work and create local jobs won't magically spring up overnight. It will take a steady, predictable stream of projects, and some small but significant investments to help local businesses retool and expand their operations.

For example, in Sitka, we are ready to do a demonstration project that will build a preschool using second-growth wood from the Tongass. Some parts of the forest that were logged long ago, in the early-to-mid 1900s, could produce the necessary wood.

We would like the Forest Service



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE BOARD

### Steve Fish

Steve rode the Alaska ferry Malaspina to Petersburg at age 19 in 1974, traveling from his native San Francisco bay area. Somehow, he ended up buying a plywood, gas powered boat the following year, and soon after caught his first halibut, knowing nothing about halibut fishing, and little enough about anything else.

Well, life should be an adventure, and the greatest adventure has been trying to be a good husband, father and person. Steve met Kari Johnson in Petersburg, where they lived before moving to Port Alexander and finally Sitka in 1991. They have three children including Lexi, Eva and Erikson.

Steve served on the board of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council including two years as Chair. He is currently president of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association.

to help cover the cost of retooling the mills to make the transition from old growth to second growth. And we are also seeking some help to finance construction of the preschool. The funding could come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's rural development office, in partnership with the Forest Service to help businesses adapt to the new opportunities in the Tongass. Our project will lay the groundwork for building a supply chain for second-growth wood in the region.

Looking farther ahead, if we are going to have a local wood products industry in Southeast Alaska, we really need an industrial-sized kiln that can dry the fresh-cut lumber before it's sold in our region. I agree with the Alaska Forest Association's call for government investment to help us get this economically important facility.

As local mills handle Tongass wood, they produce a lot of sawdust and scraps, which are a potentially valuable fuel source. Wood fuel could displace fuel oil that has to be barged up from Seattle at great expense to our communities. Sealaska in Juneau and Alaska's Coast Guard stations are installing wood boilers. The city of Craig has installed a large wood boiler for its school and pool. This is another great, economically sustainable opportunity for our region to use our own wood products.

I'm nearing retirement and have been lucky enough to make a good living in a community I love. I want the same for my son and my grandkids. Those in my generation and proceeding generations were not good stewards of all the resources of the Tongass. If the Forest Service follows through with this new, more sustainable management, we'll leave the Tongass in better shape for my grandkids and generations to come.

*Originally printed in the Juneau Empire, December 19, 2010*



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## DR. GEORGE LONGENBAUGH | A Legacy of Wilderness Conservation

**By Andy Miller**

Dr. George Longenbaugh is well remembered in Alaska for his work as a physician. A mountain south of Sitka is named in his honor and an award is given in his name to an Alaskan Emergency Medical Service doctor each year.

More overlooked is that Dr. Longenbaugh also was an outdoor enthusiast and founding member of the Sitka Conservation Society.

Dr. Longenbaugh moved to Sitka with his wife Dee and three young children when Public Health Services transferred him to Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital in 1963. He had just finished his residence in Baltimore, and Dee said he had wanted to return home to Colorado or somewhere else in the West.

Sitka was not exactly what the Longenbaughs had in mind when they thought of the West, but Dee

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said it did not seem a bad place to spend a few years. Ultimately, Dr. Longenbaugh spent four years at Mt. Edgecumbe and nearly two decades in private practice in Sitka.

Dr. Longenbaugh was an avid hunter and fisherman since childhood. Dee said he later became interested in conservation largely as a result of his good friendship with Jack Calvin.

“The more we looked around, the more it was becoming so obvious that logging was the big thing, and clear cutting, whole watersheds, and how could that remain legal?” Dee said.

Dee credited Jack Calvin as being the driving force behind SCS in the early years, but she said her husband was a passionate supporter of the group and hosted early SCS meetings at his house. The original SCS Articles of Incorporation are signed by Jack Calvin as president and Dr. Longenbaugh as vice president.

Dee said SCS was controversial in Sitka from the start. As the only surgeon in town, Dr. Longenbaugh did not have the fears of other SCS members that he may lose his job, but Dee said the family still received anonymous phone calls and once heard rumors of people wanting to march on its house.

Despite the harassment, SCS continued to grow, which, Dee said, prompted her husband to decrease his involvement. Dee said he remained a strong believer in the group’s work, but he had many other projects and felt SCS was in good hands with dedicated people taking charge.

“There were other people involved, very good people involved,” she said.

Dr. Longenbaugh died in 1984. Dee lives in Juneau where she owns Observatory Books.



Do you spend time in the Wilderness Areas around Sitka? Do you hike, paddle, boat, fish, fly, or guide into the Tongass Wilderness Areas? Do you enjoy being in the Wild Alaskan landscapes of the Tongass and finding solitude in Wilderness?

For the past two years, SCS, with the support of the National Forest Foundation, has partnered with the Sitka Ranger District on the Sitka Community Wilderness Stewardship Project. You have helped us collect hundreds of hours worth of data thousands of acres in West Chichagof and South Baranof, which will help direct appropriate management of our Wilderness areas.

This year, we are continuing with the success of this project, by helping to expand Community Stewardship Projects to other Wilderness Areas in the Tongass, and we need your help again.

If you are heading out to any Tongass Wilderness Areas in any way, please volunteer to collect data for the Wilderness Stewardship Project. You don't need to be an expert, the key is quantity. We need data from many users in as many different areas at different times.

For more information and to pick up a data collection sheet, stop by the SCS office. Also, join us for a short training session, on how to collect solitude data and identify invasive plants in the spring. You can keep up to date on the project at [sitkawild.org/wilderness](http://sitkawild.org/wilderness).

This is a great way to give back to the Tongass wilderness we use. So, let's get outside and **Get Wild in the Tongass!**

# UAS BIOLOGY 193 | In the Field



**By Andy Miller**

Thanks to the efforts of the Sitka Conservation Society and a grant from the National Forest Foundation, students at the University of Alaska Southeast will have the opportunity to do habitat restoration field work as part of a class this summer.

“Biology 193: Conservation and Society Field Studies” is an intensive week-long class that combines classroom instruction with a few days of field work with a U.S. Forest Service stream restoration crew.

SCS board member Kitty LaBounty, an assistant professor of biology at UAS, will be teaching the class with the help

## Rain Power

a film sponsored by SCS,  
will be shown with a presentation  
by Lexi Fish on

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH AT  
7:00PM

at the Sitka National Historical Park  
Visitor Center  
as part of the Evening in the Park  
Series

of SCS Restoration Coordinator Scott Harris.

Scott said the class had been an idea for a number of years but it didn't become a reality until grant funding was obtained to cover transportation costs and staff time last year. This is the first year NFF is providing the funding, which is part of a larger grant to SCS for habitat restoration and monitoring.

SCS has a mission of providing educational opportunities. In the past, SCS has worked with students in the lower elementary through high school grades, but this is the first time SCS has been involved with college-level students.

Scott said the concept of the class is to expose students to as many perspectives as possible regarding a resource management issue, before heading into the field.

Last year's guest speakers included representatives from the Sitka Economic Development Association,

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Students also attended lectures at the Paths Across the Pacific Conference that was being held in Sitka that week.

After a few days of lectures, students in last year's class went into the field to review a proposed stream restoration project on the Nakwasina River north of Sitka. The students looked at forest-plot data such as the size and number of trees, and they examined wildlife and stream habitat characteristics.

“They were exposed to a little bit of everything,” Kitty said.

Many of the students in last summer's class were from Hawaii and were studying in Sitka as part of an exchange. Kitty said they offered an interesting perspective, because the forests in their home islands have been greatly modified by human influences.

This year's field work also will be at Nakwasina, but the students will be working on the restoration project which is now underway. In particular, students will be helping the Forest Service construct in-stream habitat structures.

Kitty said she hopes the class becomes an annual offering at UAS. She said she has ideas for expanding the class, including studying ways of how to work with private land owners to restore lands.

# Starrigavan Watershed | Sitka's Biggest Classroom

By Andy Miller

More than a dozen Sitka High School students are helping the Sitka Conservation Society and U.S. Forest Service monitor restoration activities in the Starrigavan watershed near Sitka this spring.

Among other things, the students in Kent Bovee's Field Biology class will be counting plants, monitoring wildlife on cameras, and installing deer exclosure fences to keep deer out of small study plots.

A grant from the National Forest Foundation and matching funds from SCS are

which is also helping SCS fund a UAS class and the removal of slash debris following a forest thinning project in the Starrigavan watershed.

The students began their work at the start of the new semester in January. The project will wrap up during the school's fall semester in October, with SCS and the Forest Service getting the collected data.

For the students involved, Scott said it will provide not only a great learning experience but also practical

they discussed how the area is used today. Every student in the group had been to the area in the past, many to ride ATVs or hunt.

During the semester, Scott said, the students will become intimately familiar with the watershed and learn about different tactics the Forest Service has used to restore the area following the logging. They will be doing field research to determine how effective those efforts have been.

In recent years, the Forest Service has thinned the second growth forest in the study area, has rebuilt some coho ponds and has anchored large wood in the stream to create fish habitat.

"The science of landscape restoration is still in development, and a lot of people still debate how to go about it, so it's important to do these studies to constantly improve restoration techniques," Scott said.

Forest Service biologist Craig Buehler said his agency's goal is for the area to again have enormous trees like the old growth that was logged 40 years ago, but it will take generations for the second growth trees to grow to those sizes. He explained to the students that restoration is a very slow process, and they will be studying a relatively early stage in an on-going effort.



supporting the students' work. SCS Restoration Coordinator Scott Harris is supervising the project, which furthers SCS's missions of providing environmental education and getting people of all ages into the forest.

The student project is one component of the NFF grant,

skills that could be applied to a number of careers in the forest.

The students went into the field for the first time in late January for an orientation with Forest Service and SCS staff. At that session, the students discussed the history of the watershed, which was logged in the early 1970s, and

# Salmon in the Schools

By Lexi Fish

To build a future generation of Americans that is healthier, more connected to their food sources, and with a deeper respect for their natural environment, there are many approaches we might take. In Sitka, one of our chosen approaches is to introduce local foods into the school lunches that feed our precious future leaders. Given our abundance of healthy fish protein sources, the group that formed at the 2010 Sitka Health Summit decided this was the first place to start. The group, Local Fish to Schools, commenced a small pilot program this January when the kids at Blatchley Middle School returned to the classroom after

their Holiday Break.

The middle school was decided upon as a good pilot location because the students are at the age where they are starting to learn more about nutritional value of food and how to make healthy choices. As a starting point, the pilot program serves locally-caught fish as a hot lunch option on the first Monday of every month. Seafood Producers Coop has generously offered to fund the first several months of the program. The goal is to get more local fish written into schools' food services contract and to have a steady funding stream to the program, so it can be more

frequent and span to different schools.

The first lunch served was Yelloweye Rockfish Sandwich. In terms of numbers, the percentage of kids choosing the fish option was on par with what the group had hoped. The group sees this program as a way for kids to have better attention spans, eat more nutritional meals and learn about sustainable food choices. It will also help keep money circulating in our local economy, keep traditional food sources alive, and lower our community's carbon footprint in a meaningful way.

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## Wilderness Expedition Grant | Summer 2011

Imagine the expedition of your dreams...crampons digging into glacier ice?...paddle blades slicing through saltwater?...tent resting under the forest canopy?

This summer SCS would like to help make your expedition a reality, by offering a Wilderness Expedition Grant. The expedition chosen for the grant must be in West Chichagof-Yakobi or South Baranof Wilderness Area. Preference will be given to expeditions that collect new and useful data or travel to areas where our current solitude data is lacking. Preference will also be given to those obtaining other outside funds.

For questions and to find out how you can apply, contact Adam at [adam@sitkawild.org](mailto:adam@sitkawild.org).



SITKA CONSERVATION SOCIETY  
UPCOMING EVENTS:



FRIDAY APRIL 22ND

Get ready to fly, swim, scurry, or slither through town!  
In celebration of Earth Day, SCS invites Sitkans of all ages to dress as their favorite animal for the Parade of Species.

Prizes will be awarded for the most creative costumes, so start thinking about your costume now!



**"Alaska Cedar: the canary in the coal mine for climate change"**

February, 24th 7:00pm UAS Room 106  
by Paul Hennon

**"Aquatic Insects: an underwater world"**

March, 10th 7:00 UAS Room 106  
by Kathy Hocker

**"Southeast Seaweeds: incredible and edible"**

April, 21st 7:00 UAS Room 106  
by Sandra Lindstrom

**Rain Power** showing and presentation by Lexi Fish

February 24th 7:00pm  
Sitka Natural Historical Park Visitor Center



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