

TRACKS



Sitka Conservation Society Newsletter

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

SPRING

2013

Letter from the Director

By **Andrew Thoms**

Sitka is a one-of-a-kind type of community in a one-of-a-kind type of place. Even among Alaskan communities, Sitka stands out as unique as far as the beauty and accessibility of its natural surroundings, its community values, and even its rich history and culture. The mission of the Sitka Conservation Society is to protect Sitka's natural environment and to promote a sustainable economy and way-of-life, so Sitka may remain a vibrant place where future generations might experience a way of life that is as closely connected to the natural world as ours is today.

SCS began more than 45 years

ago in response to the industrial logging of the time. Protecting the Tongass National Forest, particularly through the creation of federal Wilderness Areas, was our central focus in the early years. Today we continue to advocate for the Tongass and push for appropriate management, but our work has broadened, partially in response to the current era of globalization that require local actions to build towards global solutions.

Although Sitka is a small and remote community, we believe it is a leader and should be seen as a model in its commitment to renewable energy and community sustainability. SCS has been a strong supporter of

Sitka's efforts to expand our locally produced, renewable energy supply and we have promoted initiatives for the increased use of local wood, local investment to bolster Sitka's economy, local production of food, using local seafood in school lunch programs, energy efficiency invest-

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Sitka is a model community sharing lessons of sustainability globally. Photo by Berett Wilber

The Power to Make a Change

By Ray Friedlander



Over 130 Southeast residents take a stand to demonstrate their opposition to the Genetically Engineered Salmon, dubbed Frankenfish, during the rally in Sitka. Photo by Paul Killian

“Aint no power like the power of the people ‘cause the power of the people don’t stop!” We as a community have great potential to create the change we want to see in the world, because this change is initiated with something we all have—our voice. We have the ability to envision things differently, contemplate the steps necessary to enact our vision, and then put those steps into action through our words, community involvement, and passion. These ef-

forts typically don’t have to start with a large group of people because change can begin with an individual, and that individual could be you. When I met local Sitkan Paul Rioux and experienced his determination to raise awareness about genetically engineered salmon, I was seeing firsthand the power of voice and the importance of standing up for your beliefs. For Paul, organiz-

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Demonstrating the Transition

By Scott Harris

In order to realize our vision of being a sustainable community, we need to constantly demonstrate the future we hope to have. In terms of forest stewardship, three of our programs do just that. A few years ago, the Alaska Region of the Forest Service came out with what’s akin to a policy statement. Among other things, they described transitioning from a dependence on old-growth logging to achieving more balance between recreation, restoration, conserving fish habitat, sustainable logging of young growth, and other

activities. They also made a commitment to working collaboratively with the communities of Southeast Alaska to help build sustainable community economies.

Our programs at SCS have already been successful at demonstrating this transition. Here are a few examples:

Young Growth: These are the forests that grow back after clear-cut logging. There are significant economic and ecological challenges

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE STAFF Ray Friedlander

Ray Friedlander, SCS’s new Tongass Forest Organizer, enjoys the motto: “Keep your face to the sun and you shall never see shadows.” Ray is a positive person, and although we don’t get too much sun here in Sitka, she says that she rarely experiences shadows. She says that, “people give me all the sunshine I need, and often I am amazed at the talents, hard work, and stories our Sitkan community has to share.” Ray’s environmental activism and community engagement have taken on many forms, from climate change protests and DC visits, to school gardens and forestry and conservation academic pursuits, to now working as a community organizer for SCS. Ray thinks that we have a wonderful community surrounded by the wild Tongass, and is grateful for all the experiences the Sitka community has shared with her.

Wild Tongass Fish in our Schools

By Tracy Gagnon

When SCS began coordinating the first Fish to Schools (F2S) lunches in the spring of 2011, the idea of serving local seafood in school cafeterias was not just new to Sitka but to the whole state of Alaska. By taking the initial step, we have shown other communities that it is possible to serve wild and local fish in schools. Our work has catalyzed a “Fish to Schools” movement—after just 2 years over 10 school districts are serving local seafood.

F2S was put into the spotlight statewide last spring when Alaska First Lady Sandy Parnell visited Sitka to honor the program as the Best Farm to School Program in Alaska. As a result of our successful program, the state created a \$3 million reimbursement program for schools to purchase Alaska grown and harvested foods. This program ends this spring but the Governor has included it in his budget for the next fiscal year. SCS is working with the Alaska Food Policy Council and the Alaska School Nutrition Association to advocate for systematic food policy changes that make more nutritious local foods the norm rather than the exception.

The Fish-to-Schools program is part of a growing nationwide local foods movement. In Alaska, there has been overwhelming bipartisan support for legislation to establish a



In just a few years, SCS has help catalyze a “Fish to Schools” movement; now, 10 school districts across the state are serving local seafood. Here, Alaska’s First Lady joins Sitka students at a local fish lunch. Photo by Adam Andis

“food resource development working group,” while, on the national level, First Lady Michelle Obama has been a highly visible advocate of both the local foods movement and revitalizing the school lunch program with healthier food options.

SCS is engaged in local, state, and national food policy because we see the interconnection between our food, environment, health, community, and economy. Our work as an organization is showing that change happens; alternatives to processed, high carbon “foodprint” foods are out there. We all vote with our fork everyday; we can choose to build a robust and sustainable food system on our little island in the Tongass. ➤

Blue Lake: Local Actions, Global Effects

By Andrew Miller

Sitka’s electricity supply has been powered almost exclusively by renewable energy since the 1950s. In recent years, however, Sitka’s energy consumption has outpaced its renewable energy supply. Faced with a choice between cheap diesel generators and an almost \$146 million hydroelectric expansion project, the community made a surprising decision.

The Sitka Assembly unanimously supported approval of the costly Blue Lake expansion last fall, and community sentiment for the project was overwhelming, because, in part, we in Sitka have a close connection to the environment and know first-hand the impacts of climate change.

As the impacts of climate change become more apparent each year, our society is going to greater lengths to obtain the fossil fuels that are driving climate change. We are now drilling in extreme ocean conditions and using technologies with unknown environmental consequences to extract oil from the earth. Yet, the political will to invest in clean, renewable energy sources remains low.

Unfortunately, Sitka’s decision to take the initiative to make a such a big investment in renewable energy is a rare one. Sitka moved forward on its hydro project without a commitment of federal funds and with the state providing only a small fraction of the project costs. Sitka moved forward with utility customers knowing they would bare a great deal of the costs, and fully aware that the near-term costs of the project would be greater than if the com-

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SPOTLIGHT ON THE BOARD **Judi Lehmann**

By Brendan Jones

Judith Lehmann grew up on a lake in the woods in Minnesota. At an early age she began fishing, picking blue berries, making maple syrup, eating local game and running wild in the woods. Judi's father was one of the founders of the Save the Wetlands Project, a project to preserve waterfowl areas in Minnesota.

After graduating from college Judi began a 25-year career in retail management. She raised two daughters, traveled throughout the world, and began ultra-cycling. Following her retirement, she moved to Sitka to be closer to her family.

Judi's childhood and background has contributed to her deep respect for the environment; she wishes to preserve wild areas for her grandchildren, and others. She enjoys the challenge of living in Southeast Alaska, and looks forward to using her knowledge of management, and experience in international travel to support community sustainability, and further the goals of SCS.

Making the Tongass Transition a Reality

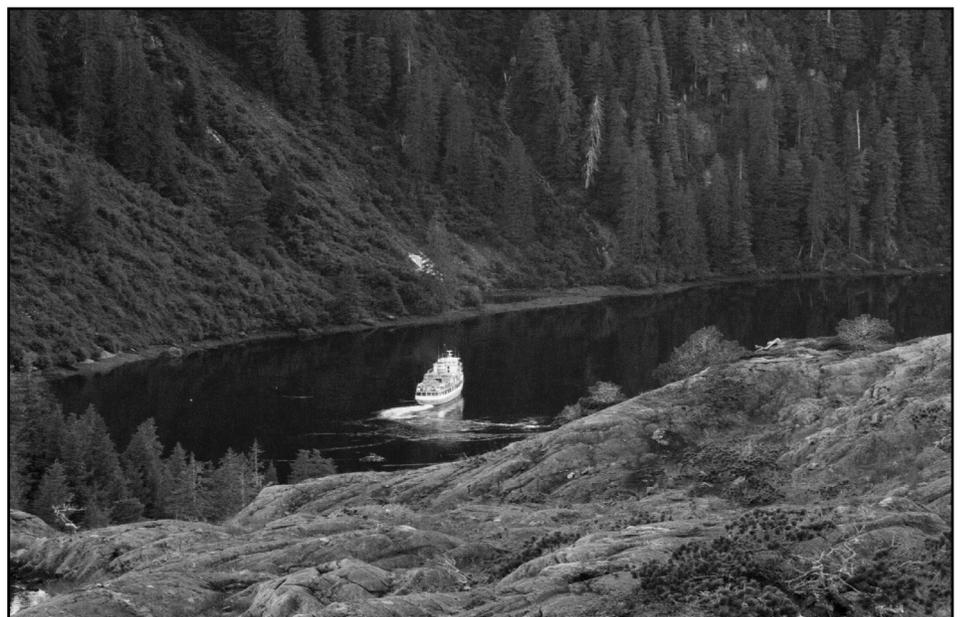
By Adam Andis

Three years ago, the US Forest Service adopted the Tongass Transition Framework, a program intended to shift forest management away from the outdated and ill-fated old growth logging paradigm toward management that supports multiple uses of the forest, including recreation, restoration, subsistence, and second-growth timber management. SCS saw this transition as a good fit with our mission to support the development of sustainable communities reliant on the Tongass while protecting the health and integrity of the forest itself. Over the past few years, we have partnered with the Forest Service on restoration projects, helped develop the capacity of small mill owners to use second-growth, and worked to support tourism in the Tongass.

The Forest Service's announcement three years ago was an encouraging recognition of the region's important natural resources, but the figures don't match the Forest Service's transition plan. For example,

logging and road building on the Tongass still cost taxpayers over \$22 million each year. In contrast, only about \$6 million a year is invested in recreation in tourism and about \$8 million is invested in restoration and watershed improvement. Our fishing industry relies on healthy watersheds and restoring damaged salmon streams. Our tourism industry relies on recreational facilities and wild places for visitors to get the Alaska experience. It just so happens that these are also the two biggest industries in Southeast, together supporting over 15,000 jobs and providing just under \$2 BILLION to the local economy. Logging on the other hand only supports 200 jobs.

We ask you to join us in asking the Forest Service to follow through with their Transition Framework by reallocating their budgets to reflect the reality of the Tongass. To find out how you can help, visit the Take Action page at sitkawild.org. ➤



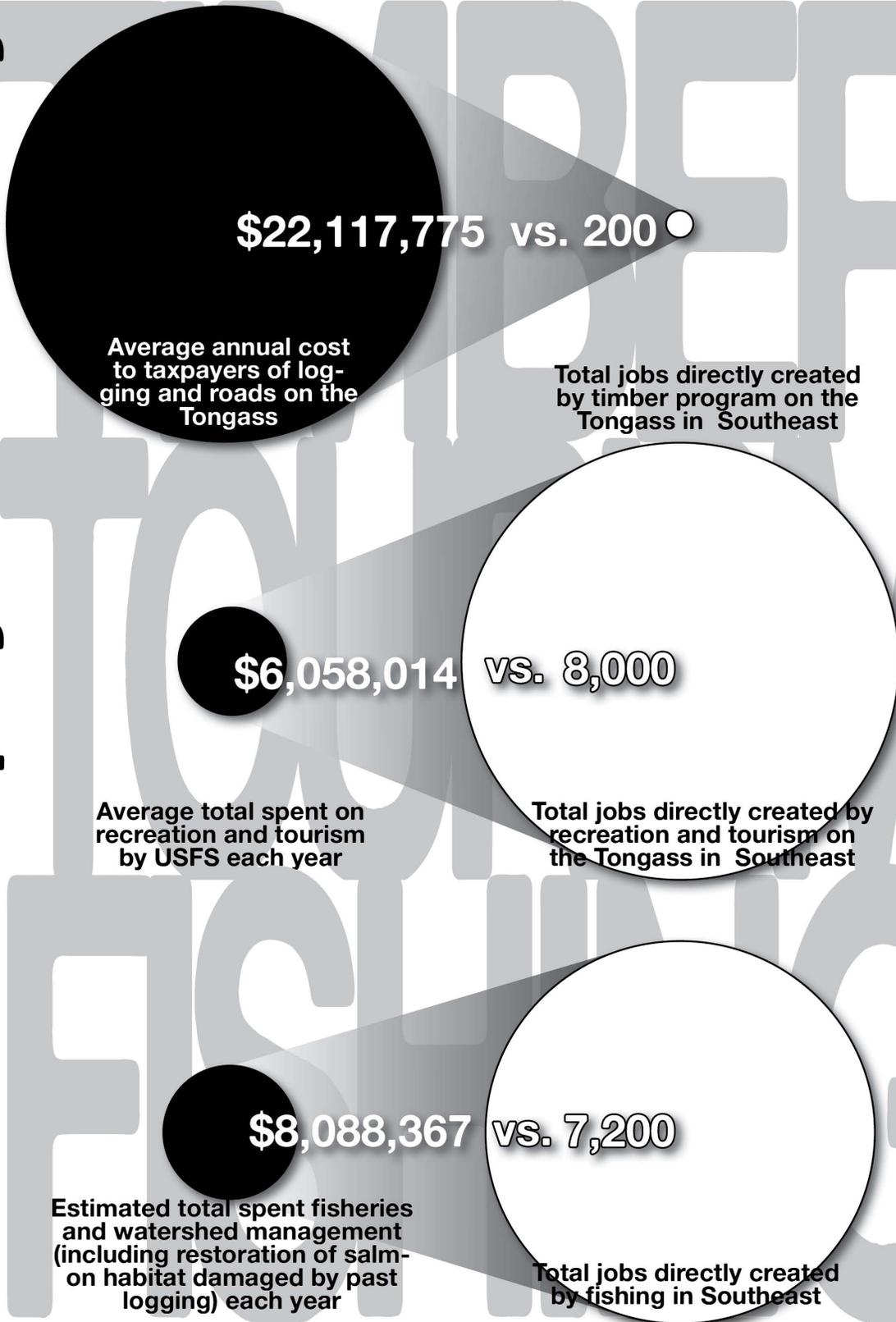
Small cruise ships like this one rely on the beauty of the Tongass for their income. In turn, the Southeast economy relies on the almost \$1 billion dollars tourism brings to the region annually. Photo by Adam Andis

COST vs. JOBS

Is the Forest Service following through with their transition?

Cost to taxpayers annually

Number of jobs supported



\$22,117,775 vs. 200

Average annual cost to taxpayers of logging and roads on the Tongass

Total jobs directly created by timber program on the Tongass in Southeast

\$6,058,014 vs. 8,000

Average total spent on recreation and tourism by USFS each year

Total jobs directly created by recreation and tourism on the Tongass in Southeast

\$8,088,367 vs. 7,200

Estimated total spent fisheries and watershed management (including restoration of salmon habitat damaged by past logging) each year

Total jobs directly created by fishing in Southeast

The Power...

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ing a rally that would protest genetically engineered salmon was one of those ways to stand up. "I saw that there were rallies going on in other parts of the country, and I decided that it would be nice to do one here," Paul said. Through Paul's actions, over 130 people came to the rally, which was then publicized by Senator Murkowski, Senator Begich, and Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkin. Four days after the event, the Food and Drug Administration announced they would extend the period to comment on genetically engineered salmon by 60 days. I'm certain that Sitka's activism helped to spur this extension.

To make this happen, we started small. We gained support from fishing organizations like the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) and the Alaska Troller's Association (ATA), who passed the message on to their members; we held sign-making parties at the SCS office, Blatchley Middle School, and Ventures; flyers were created, posted, and handed out, featuring both information on the rally and how to submit a comment to the FDA opposing genetically engineered salmon; Raven Radio had us on their Morning Interview, where myself, Paul, and David Wilcox, a Blatchley middle school student running across the country in protest of GMOs, discussed the negative impacts of genetically engineered salmon; both the Mudflats blog and Fish Radio hosted information on the rally to raise awareness to their subscribers that the FDA was considering approving genetically engineered salmon; and the day of the event, the local news sta-



Sitka's message was loud and clear at the rally: Wild Tongass salmon are too important to risk the threat of GE salmon. Photo by Paul Killian

tion, the Sitka Sentinel, and Raven Radio came out to document the event, which made it on the front page of the paper. Technology more than ever can be used to organize our social networks, tell our stories to folks that live in communities all over the country, and enforce our opinion to decision makers to listen to their constituents. This can happen with any issue that we find ourselves passionate about, and for Paul, that issue was the health of our wild salmon from the Tongass.

It is right here in our community that we can create the world we want to see through our actions, but this can only happen through an engaged, active citizenry. Far too often I encounter folks who are somewhat cynical to the democratic process, folks that have lost faith in

the power of their voice. But in the end, if no one takes action, nothing gets done.

What kind of world do you want to live in? For us at the Sitka Conservation Society, we want the management of the Tongass to benefit the communities that depend upon its natural resources while supporting the habitats of the salmon, black tail-deer, and bears that roam wildly about. Sitkans like Paul Rioux remind us that our voice is a catalyst for change, and by speaking and standing up for what you believe in, we can continuously create the world we want to live in. Let us stand up together, generate the renewable energy of people power, and work towards that future some say is a dream but can be a reality if we work towards it. ➤

Demonstrating...

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with managing young growth, and we don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. However, one vision of sustainability is that we meet our community's wood needs locally in a responsible way. Therefore, we encourage innovation and creativity to address these challenges. SCS recently published the *Guide to Tongass Young Growth and Its Uses*, which describes examples of high-value uses of Tongass Young Growth. We also sponsored 2 wood-building projects at Sitka High School so that students could experience first-hand the opportunities and challenges of working with local wood.

Restoration: SCS was a major partner in the restoration of the Sitkoh River completed last summer. We recently conducted a community-wide survey to measure people's interest in and priorities for restoration work. The top three priorities were Katlian River, the Central Kruzof / Shelikof Creek area, and Nakwasina River. Our restoration

work will focus on these areas for the next few years.

Ecological Monitoring: Sustainable communities need to be prepared to adapt to climate change and other environmental stressors. We also need to constantly learn from and refine our restoration activities and management actions. Because ecological monitoring constantly questions what we do on the land, it's an important act of humility. We conduct several monitoring studies at SCS, and have recently partnered with the Sitka Sound Science Center and the Sitka Ranger District to develop the Southeast Alaska Long-term Monitoring Network (SALMoN). A key ingredient in all of our monitoring work is to involve students in hands-on field studies. Sitka youth will be our future land managers, business owners, fisherman, and community leaders. Inspiring a sense of environmental stewardship will better prepare them for these roles.

Additional information on these programs can be found at www.sitkawild.org. ➤



The Sitkoh River restoration project that was completed last year is just one example of how SCS is helping to promote the Transition. Photo by Bethany Goodrich

Letter...

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ments, "green" marketing for the local visitor industry, and much more.

We see our community sustainability efforts as going hand-in-hand with our more traditional environmental advocacy work. For the Tongass to thrive, communities within the Tongass need to act in the best interest of the local environment. Our hope is that as Sitka acts in the best interest of the Tongass, other communities around the nation and the world will likewise strive to find ways that community development and environmental conservation are seen as mutually beneficial rather than at odds. We think globally, and act locally, as we re-imagine our relationship as a species with our planet. ➤

Blue Lake...

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community turned to diesel generators.

It doesn't seem right that a small Alaskan community should be fronting the majority of the bill for a new renewable energy project at a time when the Alaska legislature is working to give a multi-billion dollar tax break to already heavily subsidized oil companies. It doesn't seem right, but Sitka is doing the right thing.

Sitka has shown it is not afraid to make a bold investment in renewable energy. It is time for our political leaders to stand up to oil companies and follow Sitka's lead with some meaningful steps to combat climate change. ➤





Sitka Conservation Society's annual Parade of Species will be marching through town Friday, April 19th. Start gathering your feather, scales, and fur for costumes now! Check back in at sitkawild.org for more information on times, costume contest categories and prizes.



Remember to choose local fish for your school lunch every second and fourth Wednesday of the month!

Upcoming lunch dates:

- March 13th
- March 27th
- April 10th
- April 24th
- May 8th
- May 22nd

Join the conversation on



Photos, stories, advocacy updates, events, and more, online.



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