

Summary of Big Thorne Stewardship Area Collaborative Workshops

The following information is presented as a summary of the discussions, agreements and criteria reached amongst a collaborative working group, at the Big Thorne Stewardship Area workshops, held between May and August 2011: All items below were defined and agreed upon by workshop participants, representing a broad spectrum of agency, public and private party stakeholders.

Purpose: The purpose of the Big Thorne Stewardship Area Workshops is to identify and prioritize on-the-ground projects that will support local economic and ecological objectives. Workshop participants will collaborate to define shared priorities for the Stewardship area (specific actions and types of projects); identify presently missing information and opportunities for future consideration by the agency; and provide feedback to the Forest Service regarding priority projects to be integrated for future funding. A final report from the group will be drafted and approved by the final workshop, to be presented to the Forest Service to assist in the development of future budget and/or Stewardship project proposals.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Prioritize existing / known projects that are ready for implementation (but which may not have funds)
2. Identify important projects (or types of projects) that the agency has missed to date
3. Define the types of projects that could be integrated at implementation, to better serve the local private sector workforce (local economy)

Logical Working Sectors from which to Achieve Desired Outcomes:

- Recreation
- Aquatic Habitat
- Terrestrial Habitat (Vegetation)
- Access
- Subsistence

Specific Criteria / Suggestions for Each Working Sector (additional Context for these recommendations can be found in the workshop notes:

Recreation:

- Focus on new facility additions rather than enhancements to existing facilities – to increase Recreation / Tourism capacity on POW
- Consider (Recreation) projects with the greatest economic impact for the Island – those with the greatest potential to further increase rec / tourism impacts
- Look for niche opportunities that are not presently available or are under-represented (winter sports was suggested as one such niche)

- Consider Projects that span and/or compliment multiple working sectors (a new recreation cabin, constructed of young-growth from a nearby wildlife thinning unit, or trail improvements using local materials / labor, leading to a popular recreation or subsistence destination)
- Consider improvements to existing, dispersed recreation sites
- Consider proximity of developments / improvements to one another to compliment the off-island visitor experience
- Improve sanitation facilities at existing sites – especially dispersed sites

Aquatic Habitat:

- Consider overall cost-to-benefit ratio of each red-pipe proposed for treatment
- Consider both upstream and downstream risk of leaving stranded, any low-priority red pipes
- Continue looking for habitat enhancement opportunities (opening up new, presently un-used habitat)
- Focus on restoring impacted systems by working on degraded in-stream conditions AND accessing existing stranded habitat in the following order
 1. Increase and enhance diversity and distribution efforts by focusing on Stream Order (size); miles of upstream habitat and # of species present
 2. Protection of existing habitat (buffers, road crossing design requirements, etc.)
 3. Restoration of degraded habitat

Terrestrial Habitat / Vegetation:

- For PCT Actions in Big Thorne, which may be relying on retrained Stewardship Contracting receipts, focus on;
 - PCT units within OGR and other non-development LUDS
 - PCT units in which treatment will achieve multiple objectives from a single thinning
 - PCT units that are about to outgrow the PCT window and be harder to treat into the future
- Consider the importance of leaving un-treated stands adjacent to planned Old Growth Timber Harvest, to help meet wildlife cover and security objectives (e.g. snow intercept and predator avoidance)
- Recognize the importance of variety in the types of logs available into the future. Current thinning practices will not make slow growing, tight-grained logs – which carry all or most of the current value in the industry
 - Consider some longer rotations for some stands
- Consider the limited practicality of small-diameter logs in the export market to small scale purchasers. Typically, the ability to export requires a large enough volume to attract an importer, or having to work through an existing exporter who may not be willing to pay competitive prices for logs.
- Support for including CT units in the Big Thorne Stewardship Areas

Access Management:

- Stop Closing Roads Needed for Near-term management objectives
- Focus storage / closure efforts on roads that have current resource concerns/issues
- Consider aligning closures with timber stand development (timing)
- Ground-truth the POW Access and Travel Management Plan, within the Big Thorne Project Area to ensure ATM implementation can occur (context for this bullet is that some of the planned OHV access routes in the ATM are proving to be physically impossible or financially impractical to create)
- Resolve post-harvest access and road closure dilemma for new Timber Sale units to ensure access to subsistence resources.

Subsistence Management:

- Ensure that the contracted road storage work facilitates the type of access intended (so that motorized trails can be operated by OHV's and that stored roads can still be walked)
- Consider fixing the accessibility (walking conditions) of previous storage actions
- Consider a radius of X miles around a given community in which to maintain roads important to subsistence;
 - Which roads and what criteria are to be considered? Are the ATM criteria sufficient?
 - The age of a clear-cut may not be the best criteria since it is a moving target
- Consider some kind of resource criteria and proximity to town
 - The City of Thorne Bay endorses keeping open routes that have been traditionally used for subsistence
- Consider the season of use in the criteria to maintain a road in an open status
- Many comments reflected an interest in managing access specifically for subsistence users, by either;
 - Permitting Access on Stored (closed) Roads, or
 - Experimenting with Gated Closures
- Gated Closures present an opportunity to mitigate competition issues – Honker and Cutthroat Roads may be a place to experiment with seasonal openers on gated roads
- Seasonal Closures were also suggested as a form of access / subsistence management

More ideas for service projects – specific to Subsistence:

- N. Thorne Falls trail/recreation area – concerns that trail improvements here may result in over-use of a subsistence resource
- Access to water, meaning more boat launches, specifically Ratz Harbor is also important to subsistence users
- More access to free-use; firewood, timber, rock, tree-bark, etc. is all relevant to subsistence management

Project Integration Suggestions: Based on discussions with workshop participants, and specifically, with local business owners in participation; the following concepts were suggested for future project integration (under Forest Service Stewardship or other contracting authorities);

- Consider initially, the development of projects that range in value from 100-250 thousand dollars, for small business bonding considerations
- Be conscious of the types of tasks bundled in a given contract, avoiding wide disparity of work items.
 - An example of what can be potential bidders is the inclusion of highly technical aspects in an otherwise simple list of projects; such as road storage in which the removal of culverts and the installation of water bars is fairly simple – but the removal of a 70’ bridge in the same contract can exceed many operators equipment capacity.
 - A potential solution to this is to introduce each task as a separate, biddable line item in the contract
- Consider longer terms on service items, to allow industry operators time to adjust to market conditions and/or meet other business commitments
- Target initially, projects which match the capacity of the current industry and their business models – avoid creating complex integrated contracts proposals which no single entity can effectively perform.

Suggested Best Value Criteria: Discussions among participating stakeholders and agency Contracting Officers produced the following Best Value Criteria for consideration in future solicitations in the Big Thorne Stewardship Area

- A. Give consideration to proposals that bring about the greatest level of economic impact; wherein local is defined as Southeast Alaska generally, and POW particularly.
 - Consider the use of a local workforce in this criterion, such as the number of employees coming from POW
- B. Give Consideration to proposals which identify job training and/or capacity building for the intended workforce
- C. Give consideration to proposals which address the increase utilization of locally produced wood products

Prioritization Considerations

In the absence of clearly defined priorities during the workshops, Forest Service Personnel will work to prioritize the above Working Sector Criteria in the development of projects from the Stewardship Area, based upon the content included in each Sector and the track record contained in the workshop notes.

However, participants from the Nature Conservancy also suggested the following, for agency consideration when looking to create future Stewardship Projects. This information is shared here, for the entire group's consideration.

TNC Recommended Prioritization Criteria: The following information was provided by the Nature Conservancy who participated throughout the Big Thorne Public Workshops.

1. Aquatic

- Red pipes
- Instream
- Riparian thinning

2. Road storage

- Hydrologic connectivity
- Water quality
- Wildlife security

3. Terrestrial

- Pre-Commercial Thinning (PCT) – non development LUDs with bio diversity goals
 - a. Younger (10 – 25 years) YG
 - b. Older (25+ years) YG –defer until the treatment by products have value
- Commercial thinning – A priority at any time that the treatment by products have value to help offset the cost of the treatment

Aquatic restoration is the highest priority because of TNCs belief that the Tongass is first and foremost a salmon forest and because fish are usually more restricted than land animals in accessing appropriate habitat. Red pipes (culverts that do not pass fish) are very numerous on the forest and fixing them is an effective way to re-open lost habitat for salmon. Red pipes can be prioritized by considering the total length of stream habitat that will be made available, the number of fish species that will potentially use the habitat, and the plans (stored, closed, open, etc.) for the section of road where the pipe exists. Instream work such as adding woody debris, fixing unstable banks, and restructuring altered stream courses has limited opportunities, is very expensive, but improves affected salmon habitat. Riparian thinning is relatively inexpensive, has a long payback period, but may accelerate the development of large wood recruitment for future habitat maintenance.

Road storage is expensive but has multiple restoration benefits including re-establishing interrupted hydrologic connectivity when non-functioning stream crossings are removed. Water quality also can be improved when non-maintained roads are removed or fixed. Connectivity and water quality are higher priority because of salmon forest considerations. Road removal and storage can improve wildlife security by restricting access to sensitive areas.

Terrestrial restoration usually involves YG thinning. Restoration thinning objectives remove trees to improve stand diversity and/or promote understory production. Restoration PCT prescriptions can be spaced thinning, gap thinning, variable density with skips and gaps. PCT is inexpensive because small trees (<25 years) are cut. This minimizes slash problems; it wind-firms the stand allowing for more future treatment options. PCT can be accomplished by non-skilled workers with basic equipment. Older pre-commercial thinning (25+ years) is more expensive and problematic. The cut trees are usually larger. This increases the slash loading, and requires skilled workers and more specialized equipment to implement (especially if the slash is treated). These stands can be more prone to blow down and snow loading after treatment. With patience these older stands can begin to pay for their treatment as they attain commercial size. For younger stands (<25 years) variable density thinning with skips is the preferred prescription. Gaps in younger PCT can be short-lived because of in-growth from small seedlings. Gap treatments are better suited for older PCT stands that have post treatment wind and snow concerns. The best landscape plan is to use a variety of PCT treatments (including no treatment areas) across the landscape to create diversity for all resources. All things being equal, restoration thinning in non-development LUDs is a higher priority than in Timber LUDs. This is a result of long-term benefits (won't be logged) and historically more funding has been available for timber production stands.

TNC supports commercial restoration thinning. It is inexpensive, produces by products with value, and supports the transition out of old growth. Commercial restoration thinning will happen when there is a market (e.g. wood energy plant, post and pole plant, etc.) for the by-products of the treatment and when an economy of scale has been reached to efficiently supply the markets.

Restoration considerations for Native Village Corporations will probably be very similar, but will depend on the priorities of the ownership and the ownership management plan. Once a treatment has been implemented the treated area will then be on a management trajectory dictated by the

treatment. An example is: a gap treatment will add diversity and wildlife benefits to a stand, but will not add timber production benefits to the stand, so the stand will become more important for habitat and less important for timber production.