

December 17, 2021

USDA Forest Service
Thorne Bay Ranger District
P.O. Box 19001
Thorne Bay, AK 99919-001

RE: Public comments on the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis Project- Fall 2021 out-year plan

Dear Thorne Bay Ranger District,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed activities included in the Fall 2021 out-year plan for the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis Project (POWLLA). As members of the Prince of Wales Landscape Assessment Team (POWLAT), we are pleased to see many of the priorities identified through that community-driven process included in this proposal.

We support the inclusion of stream restoration, Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) improvements, invasive species management, and sustainable recreation in the out-year plan. These activities are well-aligned with the community priorities voiced through the POWLAT process and are key to improving watershed and landscape health on Prince of Wales Island.

As active partners to the USFS on stream restoration, we are particularly glad to see the proposed work in the Shaheen watershed. Not only will those projects have important instream benefits for fish habitat, but they will also improve forest conditions in the riparian corridor. Thinning riparian stands provides an immediate wood source for instream work; allows trees left standing to increase growth, providing a future source of large woody debris recruitment; and improves understory vegetation for deer and other wildlife. Improvement of deer habitat was identified as a POWLAT priority, and these projects are an opportunity to demonstrate the restorative thinning that is much needed across the island. The Shaheen project and others like it should continue to be prioritized for containing the dual benefits of both stream and forest habitat restoration.

Further, the Shaheen projects are well-aligned with the USDA Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) which directs agencies to “focus management resources to support forest restoration, recreation, and resilience.” Based on this new focus and the designation of Shaheen as a Tongass priority watershed, we would like to see this work funded so that implementation can begin in 2022. With the \$25M investment committed through SASS and the recently passed federal infrastructure bill, there has been no better time to fund and prioritize restoration in the Tongass. Funding, implementing, and adding capacity to these community-identified priority projects also continues to build trust within the communities who participate and invest their time in public processes like POWLAT.

Thank you for facilitating engagement around these proposed activities through the public workshops and out-year plan comment periods. We appreciate the opportunities to participate and help to shape the future of our National Forest.

Sincerely,

Julia Nave
Conservation Forester
The Nature Conservancy