

December 16, 2021

The following comments address proposed projects for POWLLA's Out-year plan for 2022 in the areas of recreation, watershed restoration, fish habitat, and invasive plant treatment on Prince of Wales Island. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on these and other projects that impact public lands I use for subsistence and recreation, as do other island residents and visitors.

### **Recreation**

During the workshop I was pleased to hear that recreation on POW Island will receive more attention and more direct funding. This needs to happen if we are seeking a diversified economy for the island that relies more on ecotourism and the independent traveler. Visitors come to experience what a healthy forest ecosystem has to offer. Increased hiring in recreation should be a priority for POWLLA. Future recreation use will place more demands on the existing trails and cabins. This will only increase the need for dedicated and increased maintenance funding.

Deferred maintenance of the trails, cabins, and recreation areas on POW should be taken care of and given priority before new and larger projects like the one proposed for El Cap becomes fully funded. Some of this maintenance work requires simple and relatively inexpensive fixes like cleaning, repairing, replacing, or removing rotten trailhead and trail signs, sign-in kiosks, boardwalks, viewing platforms, and road signs. These rotten and degraded structures really send the wrong message, namely that we don't care about the condition of our recreation areas and our island. This is not the message we want to send to residents or visitors using these public lands.

Areas I have visited recently that could use some "sprucing" up include the Dog Salmon bear viewing area, Trocadero Trail, Hatchery Creek viewing platforms, Cable Creek sign, boardwalk, and platform, signs along the Stanley Creek Road, signs along the Polk Road, and sections of the Eagle Creek trail to Balls Lake and Eagle Creek Campground. I'm sure a group of interested trail and recreation users could meet and come up with a more expansive list. Rather than appropriating money for new trails and cabins, it makes sense to infuse a good amount of funding to take care of these declining trails and recreation sites first.

An increase in government funding from various programs such as GAOA, SASS, the Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy, and more recently the Infrastructure Bill should mean a greater ability to complete the list of recreation maintenance and improvements in the Out-year plan, if these funds are allocated appropriately. This will mean a need for communication, cooperation, and collaboration between the people directing the use from these funding sources. The hope is that these resources are not directed towards just road improvements, and mean some real improvements in the recreation infrastructure on the island.

It was good to hear about the plan to complete the Sunnahae Trail to the alpine. Local folks have been anxiously awaiting this. Improvements to One Duck Trail and El Cap Cave Trail, two other well-used and popular trails, will continue to be an attraction and asset to the island. Hopefully the One Duck Trail rebuild will last more than a few years.

I was surprised to hear about the upgrade to the Harris River Campground. During early POWLLA discussions there were comments made that the Harris River Campground was rarely used and that there were talks of decommissioning it. If the campground is to stay perhaps immediate concerns, such as toilet upgrades, can be addressed without spending too much time and money on a campground that is not used. I know that campground and cabin maintenance is a constant battle, with too few recreation staff members and funding needed to address these needs. Hiring more employees dedicated to recreation would help. A coordinated effort to utilize volunteers might also assist with some of the needed repairs and maintenance.

During the workshop there was some discussion about the increase in recreation user conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. With more people recreating in both summer and winter months, these conflicts will increase, and should be addressed before trails are designed, cleared, or brushed out either by volunteers with a specific use in mind or FS employees. Hopefully some tried and true approaches to user conflicts can be applied to recreation sites on POW so that both motorized and non-motorized users can enjoy their public land. I am thankful for some of the road closures to motorized vehicles, my favorite being the Cutthroat Road for cross country skiing. I also hope that a few alpine areas can be designated as non motorized access, perhaps those with existing trails such as the One Duck Trail.

In January 2022 ATV use will be allowed on some of the highways on POW. This may open up entirely new issues regarding increased access to sensitive alpine and muskeg areas. ATV users will have access to many more areas directly from some of these highways, such as the Coffman Cove Road.

### **Watershed Restoration**

Hopefully Watershed Condition Framework surveys can be completed and presented to the public for the restoration work done on USFS designated Priority watersheds like the Harris, Twelvemile, Staney, and Luck. It's been quite some time, perhaps over 10 years since these restoration projects were initiated. The public needs to know that the work done on these watersheds did in fact help to restore them. The results of the surveys would go a long way to "selling" some of these expensive and heavy handed projects to the public.

**Invasives**

There has been longstanding opposition to the use of herbicides on Prince of Wales Island, especially any type of broadcast spraying. The feeling is that once herbicide application is allowed, however site and/or plant specific, it opens the door to continued and expanded use.

**Fish Habitat Improvements**

Red pipe replacements give hope to repairing some of the wrongs of past logging practices and road building. These projects are expensive, time consuming, and do for a time disturb areas. As with watershed restoration projects there should be evidence that these projects do in fact improve fish passage.

**Timber**

I realize Timber is not a part of the POWLLA Out-Year plan. Yet I still see old growth logs coming out of the forest daily, and it's the middle of December! I've never seen a bigger stack of red cedar than what I am seeing now at the Viking Mill. My concern for Prince of Wales Island has always been for the health of its forest ecosystem. Continued fragmentation and the cumulative impacts of logging on private and public land are not being addressed and need to be. The negative impacts from continued land exchanges and selection of public lands by private and state entities needs more analysis for its harm to deer, fish, and other wildlife habitat. Bit by bit the public land on Prince of Wales Island is being carved out for private use, which almost always means clear cutting old growth.

I certainly appreciate the opportunity to comment on the management of public land. I am an advocate for public land, its many uses and access to it.