

May 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- Spring 2022 out-year plan

Dear Thorne Bay Ranger District,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed activities included in the Spring 2022 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 body of planned work.

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 and forest restoration, we are particularly glad to see the proposed work in Shaheen, a USFS priority watershed, and would like to see the work beyond 2022 funded in full. Not only will the Shaheen 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, while broader vegetation management was removed from POWLLA, 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 out-year activities 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.” The \$25M SASS investment in partnership work across the region is a commendable start, but the agency must ramp up these investments internally in order to advance these priorities at scale. With the current groundswell of national-level support and funding via SASS and the 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 will continue 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 to help shape the future of our National Forest.

Sincerely,

Julia Nave
Conservation Forester
The Nature Conservancy