



Sitka Conservation Society

201 Lincoln St, Ste 4
Sitka, Alaska 99835
www.sitkawild.org
katie@sitkawild.org
907-747-7509

*Protecting the natural
environment of the Tongass
National Forest and supporting
the development of sustainable
communities in Southeast Alaska*

Attn: SCS Comments regarding Cube Cove Restoration Project #59913

Jul 22, 2022

Dear Ranger Downs:

The Sitka Conservation Society would like to offer strong support for the preliminary proposal for the Cube Cove restoration work. The Sitka Conservation Society was formed in 1967 with the aim of designating Wilderness areas to protect the natural environment of the Tongass National Forest. Now, our organization works on forest management, community development, food security, renewable energy, wilderness stewardship projects and much more. We believe that the staff at the agency have done a great job putting this proposal together and we are highly supportive of restoring this area and getting it back to full hydrological function for ecosystem function and for eventual return to wilderness character. The past human activities in this area have severely degraded the habitat and left a horrible scar on the landscape. These proposed restoration activities will begin to bring back natural functioning of the ecosystem and help accelerate natural processes. We are very supportive of this proposal.

We have a couple of requests regarding this project:

1. This area has had its wilderness character severely diminished. Although we appreciate the use of wilderness tools to get the work done when opportune (pulaskis, cross cut saws, etc), we support prioritizing mechanical tools when available to get the job done as quickly as possible. For us, this would have the more favorable benefit to the Wilderness character in the long-term and the short term impacts to Wilderness character of mechanical equipment, chainsaws, winches, vehicles, helicopters, etc. would be an easy trade-off to the long term habitat benefit. This is especially the case considering that the land was sold to the Forest Service and has not been in a Wilderness state for decades and only through a chance line-up of factors is this area able to be reintegrated into Wilderness. This suggestion is not meant to apply broadly to restoration activities in Wilderness areas, but rather recognizes the uniquely degraded nature of the Cube Cove area and the belief that restoration of hydrological and ecosystem function is of paramount importance.
2. Any opportunities to integrate youth crews from Angoon or other local contractors should be prioritized. The previous work to get the Youth Conservation Corps groups involved in the work was especially terrific and we applaud the efforts to bring that together and we hope it continues.
3. Please minimize the amount of analysis and NEPA regarding this project and move it forward as quickly as possible. These lands are hurting and have been severely impacted by Shee-Atika's logging. They need work as soon as possible and they need all the resources they can get put

into people on-the-ground doing the work. It is clear that the lands are impacted and it is clear they need to be fixed. Even NASA uses these lands as an example of devastating human impacts seen from space (<https://landsat.visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=146609>). The techniques being used to restore these lands have been thoroughly analyzed in the past and we need to put them into practice as soon as we can.

4. Please be sure to take reference photos of the sites before work is completed and after the work is done so that the long-term response of these systems can be gauged and researched.

Thank you for putting the effort into repairing these important watersheds and fixing the terrible mistake that was made in completely clear-cutting these watersheds. We are very glad that these lands are going to be re-integrated into the Wilderness area. This project will have a long term benefit for the Tongass, communities of Southeast Alaska, the salmon produced by the Tongass, and the Kootznoowoo Wilderness area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Andrew Thoms