



# *News Release*



## TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

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### **Tongass National Forest to Restore Critical Salmon Habitat this Summer \$318,000 rehabilitation project on Sitkoh River to start in June**

SITKA, Alaska – The Tongass National Forest will soon begin a major restoration project of wild salmon habitat on the Sitkoh River, in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and non-profit groups.

Located on Chichagof Island about 12 miles west of Angoon, the Sitkoh River watershed is a key salmon producer that also carries steelhead, Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout. The biologically-rich watershed also supports abundant wildlife populations including Sitka black-tailed deer and brown bear and it has a long history of use by Alaska Natives.

Although still productive, the river's fish habitat was impacted by past timber harvest and road construction practices no longer used on the Tongass. To restore natural functions and long-term fish productivity, the Forest Service and its partners have designed a project that will benefit the Sitkoh River's salmon and steelhead populations as well as rural subsistence users and commercial and sport fishermen.

The project involves re-connecting 1,800 feet of high value salmon spawning and rearing habitat diverted down an old logging road. This river section will remain unstable and unproductive if left unattended. Restoration efforts will focus on returning the river to its original channel and restoring natural function, including constructing pool habitat and stabilizing stream banks. This work will directly benefit steelhead, trout, and pink, chum and coho salmon.

"From a commercial fishing standpoint, the more high-quality restoration work the Forest Service can do on the Tongass the better it'll be for fishermen. Projects that improve fish habitat like the one at Sitkoh are a win-win for fish and the people who depend upon them for jobs and livelihoods," said Bruce Wallace, a Juneau seiner and vice president of United Fishermen of Alaska. UFA represents 37 fishing organizations across Alaska and its offshore waters.

Additionally, the project will recreate natural rearing and spawning habitat in a downstream section of the river that is also degraded. Other work includes stabilizing roads, removing artificial barriers to fish passage, and thinning hundreds of acres of thick young-growth trees to improve forest and watershed health and wildlife habitat.

“The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is committed to collaborative efforts between private partners and government agencies,” said ADF&G Commissioner Cora Campbell. “We are especially pleased to participate in a project aimed at restoring and improving salmon habitat.”

The project, which is scheduled to run through June and July, is made possible by \$185,000 from the Forest Service, \$108,000 from the Sustainable Salmon Fund administered by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, \$25,000 provided by Trout Unlimited and a major staff contribution of staffing from the Sitka Conservation Society.

“Restoring salmon habitat is a key component of the economic transition in the Tongass that the Forest Service supports,” said Alaska Regional Forester Beth Pendleton, referring to the agency’s commitment in May 2010 to work toward more diversified and sustainable economies in Southeast Alaska.

The transition plan calls for young-growth timber management, restoration of degraded salmon habitat and job creation in emerging and established industries including ocean products, visitor services, timber and renewable energy. Pendleton added, “We’re committed to supporting sustainable economic growth in Southeast, including improving stream conditions in rich salmon fisheries like Sitkoh that support so many jobs in this area.”

Last year, the Forest Service completed a nationally-recognized salmon habitat restoration project on the Harris River on Prince of Wales (POW) Island in collaboration with multiple partners. This summer, in addition to Sitkoh, the Forest Service is planning to complete an extensive restoration project at Twelvemile Creek on POW. The agency also has plans for additional restoration work at Saginaw Creek near Kake, and at Staney Creek and Luck Lake on POW.

The Forest Service has identified about 70 watersheds on the Tongass that could benefit from restoration work. The projects are located in remote areas where the use of heavy equipment poses logistical and funding challenges. Recognizing that salmon are a major driver of the regional economy, the agency is seeking to increase partnerships and investment in Southeast Alaska on salmon habitat restoration.

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