



# News Release

## TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST & THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

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@TongassNF

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### Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy earn national award for Harris River project

CRAIG, Alaska—The Tongass National Forest Craig Ranger District and partner The Nature Conservancy were recently selected for a prestigious Rise to the Future Award for Collaborative/Integrated Aquatic Stewardship. The award recognizes the large-scale Harris River watershed restoration project, completed in 2011, which improved salmon and wildlife habitat on Prince of Wales Island.

A watershed-scale effort, the Harris River Restoration Project followed an integrated approach that restored river processes, salmon spawning, and rearing habitat on 11 miles of mainstem river and tributary habitat; and improved wildlife habitat and riparian functions on 500 acres of thinned upland and riparian area. The project also included eight miles of road stabilization to restore stream connections and reduce sediment input to streams, and an expanded trail system for fishing and hunting access and interpretive use. The project provided more than \$2.3 million in local work contracts and will benefit commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing in the region.

The Nature Conservancy, working with the Forest Service and local communities, identified the Harris River watershed for its biodiversity and salmon production potential and prioritized the river for restoration under a Conservation Action Plan for Prince of Wales in 2007. TNC also raised funds to carry out much of the restoration work, earning equal recognition alongside the Forest Service for the national award.

The Rise to the Future Award is the highest national recognition of aquatic accomplishment that the Forest Service bestows. Sheila Jacobson, Forest Fisheries Biologist for the Tongass, stresses that “credit for the award goes to the many, many Tongass staff and partners who spent years making this project—the largest watershed restoration effort in forest history—such a great success.”

According to Greg Killinger, Tongass Fisheries, Watershed, and Soils staff officer, the Harris River project is wide-reaching and provides a “new model for a more inclusive and partner-rich approach to restoring larger watersheds across the forest.” By Killinger’s assessment, fish, wildlife, and people “will be reaping the benefits from the Harris River project and additional upcoming restoration efforts for decades to come.”

Speaking to the scale and significance of this integrated, joint project, USDA Under Secretary Harris Sherman visited the project site last August and attended a Harris River “Restoration Celebration” that featured Native dancing, a field trip to the project area, and an exhibition by acclaimed photographer Amy Gulick. “An incredible aspect of this project was the ceremonial renaming of one of the tributaries by the local Haida people to Gandláay Háanaa, or ‘Beautiful River’,” as part of the Celebration, said Randy Hagenstein, Alaska State Director of The Nature Conservancy. “That ceremony reminded me that our work really matters—to rivers, to salmon, to bears, to each and every one of us, and to the original Haida stewards of the Harris watershed.”

Craig District Ranger Francisco B. Sanchez could not agree more, adding, “the partners and employees working together, restoring a stream and making the change happen on the ground is something we all are very proud of. With the support of the Under Secretary and Mr. Hagenstein, we’ll be able to carry on the great partnerships we forged restoring our Gandláay Háanaa!”

Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy staff traveled to Washington, DC in March to accept the award during a ceremony at the National Archives.

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