



## Sitka Conservation Society

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*“Protecting the natural  
environment of the Tongass while  
supporting the development of  
sustainable communities in  
Southeast Alaska”*

### UPDATE REPORT: NFF WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE

September 2011

#### PROJECT: WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP ON THE TONGASS NATIONAL FORREST

**Summary:** The objectives of this project are to collect baseline social and ecological data to assist the Tongass National Forest meet the elements of the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge and to better manage the Wilderness areas in the Tongass. The project also seeks to build a network of citizen Wilderness stewards by using data collection activities as an outreach tool to engage diverse segments of our community and by using the experienced gained through previous year’s projects to encourage locals in other communities throughout the Tongass to begin their own stewardship groups.

**Highlights:** Already this year the project has been a huge success. Sitka Conservation Society (SCS) has gained tremendous experience in on-the-ground wilderness stewardship over the past 2 project years. Our goal this year was to utilize that experience to build the overall capacity of wilderness management in the Tongass by fostering stewardship project in communities that rely on local Wilderness areas. We conducted visits to 4 new districts outside of our own local Sitka District. We assisted Wrangell District by sharing our protocol and collection data and conducting rare and invasive plant surveys to address Element 2 in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. SCS partnered with the Hoonah District to assist in Element 5 & 6 through a field expedition to Pleasant Island W.A. SCS also partnered with another regional group to organize a community meeting attended by 12 community members in Gustavus (Gustavus population is only 300!) to learn about Wilderness stewardship. In Russel Fjord Wilderness, SCS worked with the Yakutat District on Element 2,5, and 6 and shared protocol and data collection methods to help them develop their own. At the time of writing, a wilderness trip is planned to Tebenkof Bay Wilderness, to assist in Element 5 and to remove a plot of invasive plants that the Petersburg District has marked as a priority for removal.

In addition, we have continued and strengthened our partnership with our local district to raise our scores on Elements 2, 5, and 9 in West Chichagof and South Baranof Wildernesses. This summer we recruited volunteers to help us conduct 10 remote field site visits to areas where difficult access (all sites boats, planes, or many days of travel by foot) and unpredictable weather make it extremely costly and challenging for the Forest Service to access. Three more trips are planned before project end. In order to increase our monitoring coverage and to increase wilderness awareness and outreach, we successfully mobilized a cadre of volunteers to collect data that helps the Forest Service meet their objective of managing for “outstanding opportunities for solitude.”



We are especially proud to report that we are this year's recipient of the **Region 10 Wilderness Partner of the Year Award** for last year's NFF-funded partnership of the Wilderness Stewardship Project. We were able to use this award to draw more attention to the importance of Wilderness stewardship initiatives.

Other highlights include two trainings to outfitter/guides that use Wilderness areas to teach Leave No Trace, responsible Wilderness stewardship, and educational resources for guides to teach clients about Wilderness areas. Two similar trainings were held to teach community members and project volunteers invasive plant identification and solitude monitoring protocol.

**Results:** Project planning began in April by refining solitude forms and working with guides to develop new forms and protocol for big game hunting outfitters (an area identified in last year's project), planning ecological monitoring trip logistics, and contacting other districts throughout the Tongass to determine how SCS could provide the most assistance. Achievements to date include:

- All 61 guide/outfitters with permits in Sitka District Wilderness areas were contacted and asked to assist in collecting data. 15 agreed to help with the project.
- 2 Leave No Trace Trainer certification classes were held. 1 FS ranger, 4 guides, and 1 volunteer received LNT Trainer certification.
- 5 guides from 3 different companies attended a training on Wilderness and wilderness monitoring
- 3 community presentations were conducted in three communities, attended by 26 community members. (1 additional presentation will be presented in Sitka this fall)
- 14 community volunteers attended a kayak safety and skill course (important because this is how the vast majority of Wilderness users visit the areas)
- 10 field site visits were conducted in the West Chichagof-Yakobi, South Baranof, Russel Fjord, Pleasant Lemasurier and Inaian Island, and Stikine-LeConte Wilderness Areas
  - All 10 collected solitude data
  - All 10 collected recreation site inventories
  - 7 conducted invasive plant surveys
- 871 hours of solitude observation data were collected (not all forms and data have been collected as of Sept 2011)
- 22 recreation sites have been naturalized
- Over 800 lbs of trash were collected on SCS organized volunteer beach clean-up days
- 75 community members and visitor from around the world participated in a fund-raising Wilderness boat cruise

**Finances:**

- A Financial Report Form is attached.
- A request for budget modification approval is attached.

Thank you,



Adam Andis  
Community Outreach Coordinator  
Sitka Conservation Society

