

Sitka Conservation Society

Wilderness Partner of the Year



The Sitka Conservation Society has been awarded the Region 10 Wilderness Partner of the Year Award by the U.S. Forest Service for its work with the Sitka Ranger District to develop a citizens' stewardship monitoring program of the South Baranof and West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness Areas.

In presenting the award, the Forest Service applauded SCS's work in promoting community involvement, raising awareness of Wilderness values and ethics, generating discussion on benefits of Wilderness and gaining support for management of Wilderness.

For the last three years, the Sitka Conservation Society's Wilderness Stewardship Project has sought to be the eyes and ears of Tongass Wilderness Areas. The project not only sends professional teams into remote Wilderness Areas to research ecological conditions in Wilderness and assess climate change impacts, but it also involves the general public and Wilderness users to collect data and become invested in Wilderness protection as well. Commercial fishermen, guides, outfitters, hunters and various recreational users have

contributed to over 1,000 hours of data collected as part of the program. All collected data has been integrated into the Forest Service database to be included in long term monitoring and research.

The goal of the project is to better learn about natural dynamics and human use of Wilderness and to ensure

"The work of SCS has helped promote community involvement, raise awareness of Wilderness values and ethics, generate discussion on community benefits from Wilderness, and gain support for management of Wilderness and other areas on the Tongass National Forest."

-- Ruth Monahan
Deputy Regional Forester

that future generations are able to find and benefit from the same pristine Wilderness as was originally designated by Congress. The project has also proven successful in getting a broader base of support for Wilderness designation from SE Alaska residents through their involvement and their joint efforts with others who love and depend on Tongass Wilderness Areas.

SCS Executive Director Andrew Thoms said SCS was honored to receive the award and sees it as affirmation that the Forest Service is committed to Wilderness preservation.

"We are happy the Forest Service values our work and our partnership with them," Thoms said. "We see this project and their focus on Wilderness as an af-

firmation of the passion and years of fighting that it took to originally designate these Wilderness Areas. It is a big change from when the Forest Service was opposed to Wilderness on the Tongass and saw Wilderness as an obstacle to clear-cut timber harvest.” Thoms further states that he sees their involvement in these efforts as proof that they are committed to the ‘transition framework’ vision that articulated a phasing out of Old Growth timber harvest and management of the Tongass that better serves the ways that communities that live within the Tongass use and depend on the resources of the nation’s largest National Forest.”

SCS will continue this successful project in 2012 and will integrate more volunteers, community members, businesses, and scientific researchers. SCS is also helping to get more wilderness stewardship programs started in other Ranger Districts across the Tongass National Forest.

The Sitka Community Wilderness Stewardship Project



In 2009 SCS launched the Community Wilderness Stewardship Project to bring together people and wilderness in an original and exciting way. Funded by the National Forest Foundation and SCS’s Living Wilderness Fund, this project creates a working partnership between the US Forest Service, SCS, and a broad spectrum of community members to conduct research expeditions and monitoring in Tongass Wilderness areas. By kayak, float planes, skiffs and on foot, volunteers are exploring some of the most wild and remote places in Southeast Alaska. Working together for the common goal of stewardship, we can experience wildness first-hand and gather needed baseline data about these significant areas.



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