



Partnering for Salmon Restoration

and creating sustainability for the communities of Southeast Alaska



SITKOH RIVER RESTORATION

The Sitka Conservation Society, Trout Unlimited, and the US Forest Service, in conjunction with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Sustainable Salmon Fund, have committed resources to conduct a multi-year salmon habitat restoration program on the Sitkoh River.

THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

Salmon are a critical element to a healthy ecosystem that supports subsistence, commercial, charter, and sport fisheries. For example, the approximately 5,000 salmon-supporting streams on the Tongass National Forest provide spawning and rearing habitat for 90% of the commercially-caught salmon in Southeast Alaska. Salmon also play key roles in the transfer of nutrients between the marine and terrestrial environments and as a food source for other animals, enriching the surrounding forest and contributing to overall ecosystem productivity.

Past timber harvest and road-building practices (mostly in the 1970's) in the Sitkoh River Watershed contributed to impaired watershed function and salmon habitat. A recent analysis conducted by The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service identified the Sitkoh River as one of the seven highest priority watersheds for restoration on the Tongass National Forest. In public forums the community of Sitka has consistently stated that restoration in the Sitkoh area is a high priority, particularly for coho salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat. The Trout Unlimited Alaska Program has also identified the Sitkoh River as one of its 25 Restoration Priority areas.



Above: A portion of the Sitkoh River is diverted down the adjacent logging road - poor habitat for overwintering coho salmon and an ideal candidate for restoration © Scott Harris/



Use Google Earth to see the project location and more photos

Follow this link and download the tour:

sites.google.com/a/sitkawild.org/sitka-stewardship/google-earth-tour

Follow this link to install Google Earth on your computer:

www.google.com/earth

THIS PROJECT WILL RESTORE 2 SECTIONS OF THE SITKOH RIVER

Phase one of this project will restore 1,800 feet of critical salmon rearing habitat. In this section the Sitkoh River has diverted down the adjacent logging road and is shallow and wide with no pool habitat. The diverted river flows through previously harvested areas that are covered by alder and lack large conifer trees that would someday fall into the stream and provide fish habitat. *If left alone, the diverted segment of Sitkoh River will most likely continue to widen and erode the unstable roadbed, impede fish passage at high and low flow periods, increase the risk of overwinter fish mortality, and further degrade fish habitat downstream.*

This project will restore Sitkoh River to its original stream channel location. Portions of the stream channel will be reconstructed to create self-maintaining pools and riffles, restore hydrologic function, and inhibit future diversions to the road. This will allow riparian trees to grow large and serve as future sources of woody debris.

Phase two will add large wood structures to an impaired downstream segment of Sitkoh River to improve salmon spawning gravels, create pool habitat and provide gradient control structures that reduce erosion/sedimentation and stabilize stream banks. With the funding provided by SCS, TU, and ADFG for phase one, the Forest Service will be able to commit additional resources to phase two of this project.

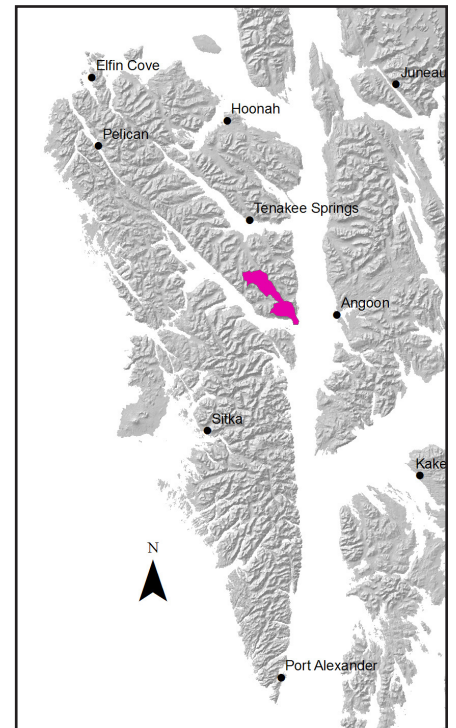
This project also establishes a working partnership for ecological restoration on the Tongass National Forest. We plan to replicate these efforts in areas that have the highest ecological value and are defined by stakeholders as high priorities for restoration.



Above and below: Streamflow will be restored to the original channel, connecting existing large wood habitat structures © Scott Harris/SCS



Right: The Sitkoh River and Bay Watersheds (shaded area) on Chichagof Island in Southeast Alaska.



For more information, contact
Scott Harris
Restoration and Special Projects Coord.
Sitka Conservation Society
scott@sitkawild.org
907-747-7509

Perry Edwards
Ecosystems Staff
Sitka Ranger District, Tongass NF
pedwards@fs.fed.us
907-747-4220