

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Government, business and non-profits collaborate on workforce development
Second Forestry Training Academy on Prince of Wales Island is underway

(Thorne Bay, AK) — This week on Prince of Wales Island, 13 students attending the second Forestry Training Academy are proof that collaboration can be more than just a buzzword. The Forestry Training Academy is two weeks of training to prepare students for local jobs in natural resources. The U.S. Forest Service, state Division of Forestry, state Division of Economic Development, Sealaska Timber, Spruceroot Community Development Fund and Sustainable Southeast Partnership are working together to support the academy for a second year.

Why are federal, state, private and non-profit groups all invested? Each share a common objective to support sustainably-managed forests and sustainable communities with healthy economies. The academy puts local people to work in local jobs, gathering valuable data about area timber stands. Land managers across the region have forestry jobs to fill and the partners believe that keeping jobs local is good for industry, good for communities and good for Alaska.

“We are interested in a strong regional economy and working forests managed by a trained, local workforce,” said Sealaska President and CEO Anthony Mallott. “Maintaining a focus on sustainable harvests helps achieve that.”

The academy is an outgrowth of the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC), a federal advisory committee formed while the Forest Service was amending the Tongass National Forest management plan. The TAC brought together stakeholders from the timber industry, environmental groups, Sealaska, and the State of Alaska to advise the Forest Service on how to support the transition to young-growth timber harvest and provide for a viable forest industry in Southeast Alaska. Among its final recommendations in late 2015, the TAC recommended investing in a skilled local workforce as an integral piece of developing a more sustainable timber industry.

“The workforce academy is a key element of the new Tongass Land Management Plan, put into action. It’s good for the region and it is an improvement in forest management,” said Andrew Thoms, a TAC member and executive director of the Sitka Conservation Society.

Last year, eight students graduated from the academy equipped with place-based natural resource skills and knowledge immediately transferable to local careers. The Division of Forestry immediately hired six graduates and Sealaska Timber offered a position to another. In December, two of the graduates working with the Division of Forestry on young growth inventory were offered long-term positions with the Forest Service.

Collaboration has proven essential for supporting the academy and the partners also believe that collaboration across land managers is good for sustainable and effective land management.

“This is part of the USDA's All-lands approach to land management. The Forest Service is working together with the State of Alaska and adjacent land owners to develop a more robust and sustainable approach to forestry across our region,” said Beth Pendleton, Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service-Alaska Region, currently serving as the Acting Associate Chief of the agency in Washington, D.C. “The Forestry Academy also helps carry out the

TAC's recommendations to develop a local workforce and to support the inventory of young growth timber," she said.

Alaska State Forester Chris Maisch added, "This team effort is producing impressive results in both the classroom and in the woods. No single organization has the required talent and capacity to accomplish the training and the ensuing project work on its own. The new hires have a great work ethic and pick up new skills rapidly through their work with our forestry team."

The second Forestry Training Academy started on Monday, March 20 and is underway until March 31. It will cover basic forestry skills, best practices, U.S. Forest Service safety requirements and Division of Forestry inventory protocol. The training will also offer students classroom and in-the-field instruction to practice, develop and test skills. Twenty-eight applicants competed for 13 openings this year. All 13 students are from Alaska: four from Ketchikan, one from Haines, one from Metlakatla and seven from Prince of Wales Island.

"Prince of Wales is my home and I am motivated to help sustain and safeguard what is left of the Tongass. I am ready for new challenges within the dynamic environment that the Forest Service represents," said Christa Hambleton, an academy participant from Port Protection.

Hiring local workers allows people in rural communities to stay, work, and raise families in their traditional homes. And many of the natural resource jobs are year-round and well paying. Hiring local allows more money to circulate in the economy and helps create more sustainable communities. Graduates will qualify for immediate employment opportunities with the Forest Service, Division of Forestry and others.

CONTACT: Reporters interested in interviewing academy participants, going into the field or visiting the Forest Academy between March 20-31, 2017, should contact U.S. Forest Service Public Affairs Specialist Dru Fenster at 907-209-2094 or dfenster@fs.fed.us. For photos from this year's academy, please contact Sustainable Southeast Partnership Communications Director Bethany Goodrich at 907-747-7509 or bethany@sitkawild.org.

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