

# Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy

Trails Conference - April 2023

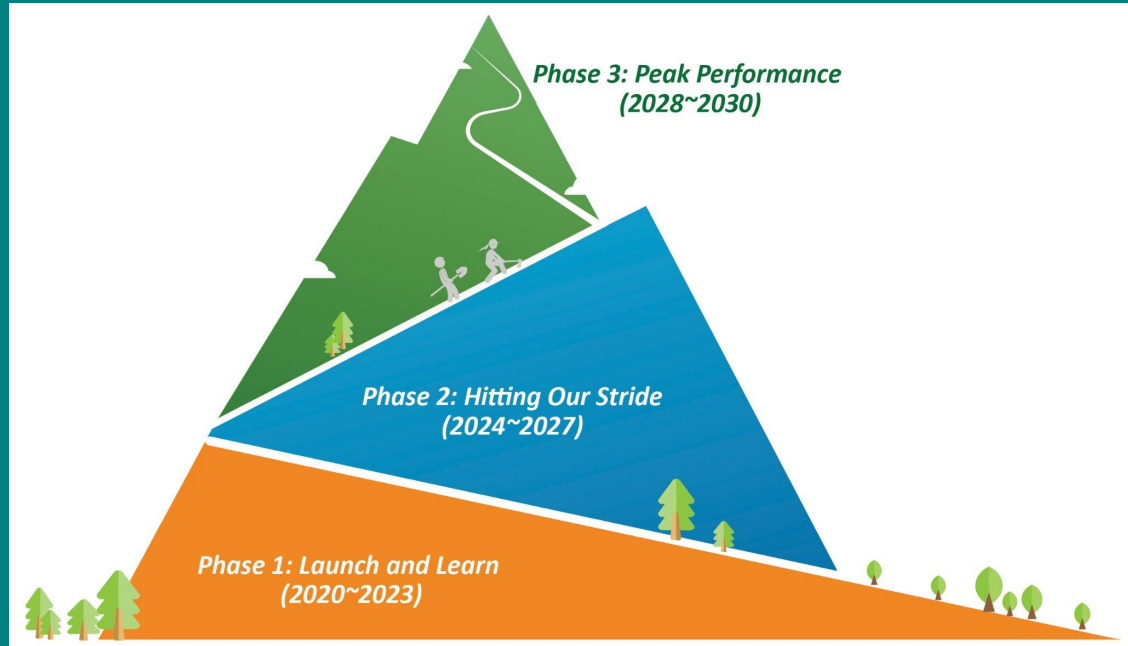


# 10-YEAR TRAIL SHARED STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE

A National USFS Initiative to help carry out the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System and the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Challenge goals:

1. Increase collective trail workforce capacity
2. Increase trail sustainability





# TONGASS SUSTAINABLE TRAILS STRATEGY (TSTS)

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- Created because of the 10-year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge
- Inspired by Alaska Trails' Trails Investment Strategy
- Initial plan:
  - Phase 1 - trail reconnaissance, research
  - Phase 2 - representative sample of Ranger Districts & communities, community & stakeholder outreach, final recommendations for trail projects & “general approaches”
- Additional funding → led to another year of work in additional Ranger Districts and communities

# “SUSTAINABILITY” DEFINED

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For the purposes of the Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy, a sustainable trail system is defined as *environmentally appropriate, financially feasible and community supported.*





# TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST COMMUNITIES

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- Community driven approach - atypical for Forest Service planning
- 7 Ranger Districts - Yakutat, Prince of Wales (Craig and Thorne Bay), Hoonah, Ketchikan, Wrangell, Sitka, Petersburg
- Communities - Yakutat, multiple Prince of Wales communities including Craig, Thorne Bay and Coffman Cove, Hoonah, Ketchikan, Wrangell, Sitka and Kake

# TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST COMMUNITIES

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- One way to help ensure that trails and trail systems are “sustainable” is to be sure that they are *community supported*.
- Communities support trails that:
  - Are utilized by the community
  - Find a balance between local and visitor use
  - Help to sustain local businesses
- Communities know best what their trail needs are!





# TSTS - COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROCESS

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- Stakeholder identification: super users, casual users, outfitter/guides, visitor organizations, local businesses, economic organizations, public health organizations, cities, boroughs, tribes & tribal entities
- Stakeholder outreach: diverse methods of soliciting feedback - email, phone, virtual and in person meetings, online surveys, trailhead surveys, casual conversations
- Prioritization and analysis of trail projects *from a user and community perspective*

# TSTS - COMMUNITY OUTREACH CHALLENGES

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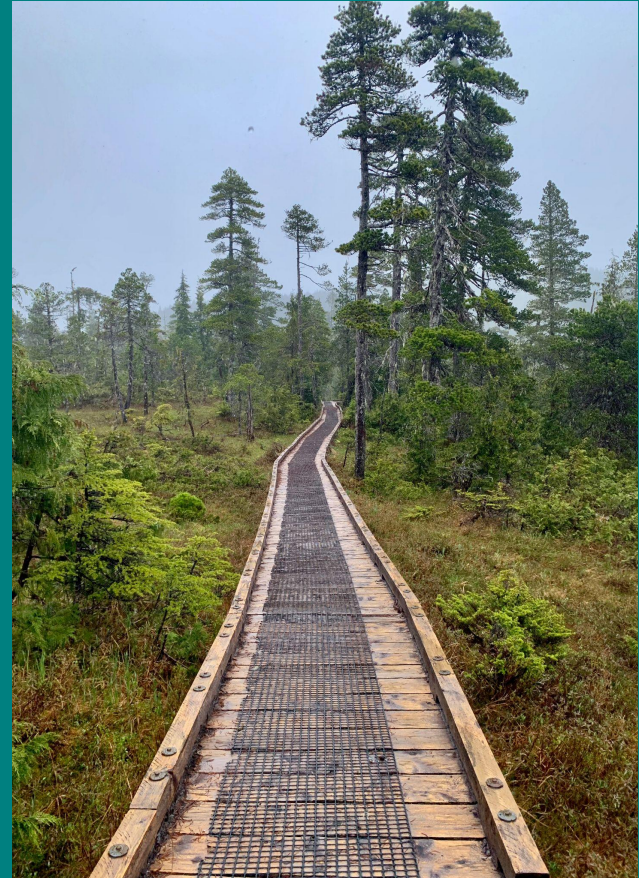
- Perspectives and opinions about the Forest Service
- Planning and feedback fatigue
- Communities with higher priority and higher urgency needs than trails and trails planning
- Disruptions due to Covid-19
- Community events and seasonality of Alaska lifestyles - fishing, hunting, breakup, etc.



# ADVANTAGES OF ALASKA TRAILS

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- Honest feedback from stakeholders
- Integrate community and stakeholder priorities into trails planning that too often leaves them out!
- Bridge the gap between Forest Service planning and existing trails and outdoor recreation planning processes and documents
- Help partners come together to achieve connectivity of trail systems
- Operate outside of the constraints placed on National Forest planning processes



# TSTS - STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

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- Chapters:
  - Introduction
  - Forest-wide
  - Ranger District Chapters
- Forest-wide - mostly issues and opportunities
- Ranger District Chapters
  - Trails to build, maintain and decommission
  - Additional, Ranger District specific issues and opportunities





# TSTS - LESSONS LEARNED

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- A third party entity is a great conduit for receiving honest feedback from stakeholders.
- When trails and trails issues transcend land manager boundaries, a third party entity can help.
- In-house trails and recreation planning at the land manager level may not have the capacity for robust community outreach.
- Entrenched and/or institutional issues can be a barrier to sustainable trail systems, but it is still valuable to receive feedback and think creatively about these issues.

# TSTS - OUTCOMES & NEXT STEPS

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- The TSTS will be used by nonprofit partners in their trail planning efforts, grant applications and additional community outreach.
- The TSTS will be used by Ranger Districts and their staff to prioritize trail projects and when applying for trails funding.
- The TSTS will be a tool for communities and partners to help their Ranger Districts through fundraising, maintenance and accountability.



A wide-angle photograph of a mountain trail. The trail is a narrow, light-colored path winding up a grassy, rocky slope. A small hiker is visible on the trail. The background shows more mountain peaks under a cloudy sky. A teal triangle is in the top right corner, and another teal triangle is in the bottom left corner. A white curved arrow points from the text towards the bottom right.

**QUESTIONS?**  
**Don't hesitate to**  
**reach out!**



**Learn more and stay in touch!**  
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