



Partnering for Salmon Restoration

*and creating sustainability for the communities
of Southeast Alaska*



SITKOH RIVER RESTORATION

The Sitka Conservation Society, Trout Unlimited, US Forest Service, and 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. This analysis considered the amount of salmon habitat, miles of roads and acres of harvest, and proximity to sources of labor. Additionally, 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 identified the Sitkoh River as one of its 25 Restoration Priority areas.



Above: The Sitkoh River flowing down the adjacent logging road - poor habitat for overwintering coho salmon and an ideal candidate for restoration © Scott Harris/SCS



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

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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 occupies the adjacent logging road. 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 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 and create engineered structures to stabilize the stream course and minimize diversion to allow for riparian trees to grow large and serve as future sources of woody debris. The original stream course is capable of functioning as high-value fish habitat due to the existence of several legacy wood structures (i.e. logjams), a diverse channel morphology (i.e. pools, undercut banks, sinuosity, etc.), and standing large riparian conifers.

Phase two will restore downstream large wood habitat structures in Sitkoh River and stabilize the bank by installing engineered logjams.

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

For more information, contact
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Above and below: Streamflow will be restored to the original channel, connecting existing large wood habitat structures
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Right: The Sitkoh River and Bay Watersheds (shaded area) on Chichagof Island in Southeast Alaska.

