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A summary of remarks made at the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POW LLA) open house in Thorne Bay, December 12, 2016

Recreational enhancements that will help, support community resiliency, and provide economic development.

Launch sites, cabins and campgrounds

Prince of Wales Island has experienced major changes in its economic base during the last quarter of a century or more. With the shift away from timber harvest, especially the logging of old growth forests, many communities on the island have been forced to adapt. Financially, communities are trying hard to adjust to changes in the way they operate because of the loss of funding sources associated with logging.

One of the things that seems to be increasing is tourism. It brings new dollars to the island, and those dollars are turned over a number of times, to benefit many individuals and communities. It would seem logical to support the tourism at a level that is compatible with the unique character of the island. That would mean trying to strike a balance between too many visitors, and not enough. Different people will argue for different levels of course.

I am suggesting that there be recreational enhancements. Giving people who live on the island and those who are visiting better access would help bring more people and increase the geographical dispersal of users. Spreading the user population out geographically and over time would minimize the impact on island residents. The communities that support the needs of visitors would still benefit from those sales.

I am suggesting that there are at least three areas that could use enhancements or new access:

El Capitan [ndash] There is an existing boat launch at El Capitan that could use updating. The area lends itself to the creation of a better launch facility and parking. Updating this facility would increase usage, offering boaters a safer and shorter run into Sumner Strait, as well as increase occupation for Shipley Bay cabin.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to create a rental cabin on the [ldquo]loop[rdquo] that exists there. The cabin would be on the road system and would be available to more people than just those with the ability to own or rent larger boats, or charter aircraft. It would also be a perfect location to make handicapped accessible lodging, so those who are confined to wheelchairs or other adaptive devices could have access.

Red Bay [ndash] This area would benefit from a boat launch site. Trailerable boats could find access to parts of the island and waters in the northern part of POW and Sumner Strait that presently most boaters cannot access from safe water. Again, it would allow many more people to recreate in the northern part of the island and encourage dispersal of the population, whether visitors or residents.

Ratz Harbor - There is a ramp of sorts at Ratz Harbor presently. It is marginally usable for small skiffs to launch and retrieve. If there was a ramp constructed at that location, small skiff users could utilize that area of Clarence Strait, and have a protected bay to retreat to in the event of fast storms.

All three of these locations would be beneficial to users trying to access the waters and shores of Prince of Wales Island and beyond. They would all encourage tourism to the island, but would not concentrate the visitors in any one particular community.

Logging roads

Logging roads on Prince of Wales Island offer the users of public lands access to areas of the island that otherwise would be unavailable to them. It is true that for physically fit persons, the entire island is accessible. Unfortunately, for those of us who have not aged as gracefully as we might like, hiking into and out of many places on the island it not possible.

It has been the general practice to close logging roads immediately after logging is done. The result has been that a tremendous amount of usable firewood has been left to rot. Rotting wood has benefits, so it is not a total loss, but it would seem that the cull logs should have a higher use. Many otherwise usable miles of road have been closed to vehicular access. Some of the road cuts are so severe it is difficult for some hikers to traverse. Leaving logging roads open for use, without unnecessary road cuts is desirable to users. Even if the roads are left unmaintained and they are overtaken by new growth, it would be much better than just digging them out and abruptly stopping use.

Wildlife diversity

Prince of Wales Island has many different parts to it. The habitat diversity found on the island would seem to allow for the introduction of other species that are already found, and prosper, in SE Alaska. Elk and moose are two of the big game species that come to mind. Populations of either or both of those animals would encourage more use of the Tongass National Forest by hunters or those just wishing to view or photograph them, and would also add new food sources for predators, such as wolves.

Conclusion

All of the above would increase access to and use of national forest lands on Prince of Wales Island. The changes would bring more people to the island providing economic development in support communities and thus support community resilience throughout the island. In many instances, these changes would allow many more users who lack the financial resources to purchase more expensive options, to gain access to the island. The changes would promote businesses for boat and vehicle rentals, as well as camping, fishing and hunting equipment and various other supplies and food.

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