MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST,
THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE,
THE
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME,
THE
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SOUTHEAST,
AND
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF ALASKA

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes a framework for coordination and cooperation between the USDA Forest Service, Tongass National Forest (USFS), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) and The Nature Conservancy of Alaska (TNC), and serves as an umbrella for more specific projects and collaboration related to the Southeast Alaska GIS Library.

I. PURPOSE

The Southeast Alaska GIS (Geographic Information System) Library project is composed of a group of federal and state resource management agencies and academic educators working toward cost-effective production, ready availability, and greater utilization of geospatial data and applications, and using these tools to further research and improve management of public resources in Southeast Alaska.

The Southeast Alaska GIS Library will provide a framework for coordinating the acquisition and sharing of spatial data between the public, researchers, educators, and managers. It will also provide a forum for discussing regional data standards, future data needs and opportunities for collaboration.

II. BACKGROUND

For over fifteen years, the US Forest Service has been using GIS to monitor, evaluate and plan projects throughout the Tongass National Forest. Used in this capacity, GIS is an efficient and powerful decision-making tool; it is particularly useful in remote and fragmented landscapes such as Southeast Alaska. Through GIS, it is possible to have
‘virtual access’ to thousands of salmon streams, miles of shoreline, and acres of forested lands. And, more importantly, have the ability to ask complex spatial questions about how these features interrelate. Despite the utility of the GIS database to anyone involved in resource management issues, there has been no organized effort to share or distribute this information.

Recently, the USFWS and the ADFG have begun to use GIS in support of their regulatory responsibilities, monitoring efforts, and research projects, which is creating a need for access to more detailed data than is generally available through public channels. It is unlikely either of these agencies would have the financial resources to develop a GIS database similar to the one created by the USFS, and in reality, it would be inefficient for them to do so. By sharing the USFS database, these agencies will have GIS capacity that ranges from creating simple maps to include in their reports to conducting very complicated analyses.

The UAS has a GIS lab and is designated as a GINA (Geographic Information Network of Alaska) node making it a logical place to house the SE AK GIS Library. The UAS is integrating GIS into its environmental sciences program and using the technology in a number of research areas. Access to the USFS GIS database will give students and researchers a solid foundation from which to conduct analyses, develop new applications, and models, and provide a unique teaching tool.

Though the USFS has been cast as the primary data provider, the Agency will benefit from this relationship. Currently, the Tongass National Forest has no established data distribution system, and has been unable to provide online access to its geospatial data. Through this project, the majority of those duties will be shifted to the project staff, and public access to geospatial information will improve dramatically. To date, the USFS has been unable to satisfy the Federal requirement to document its spatial data holdings with standard metadata. As part of this project, the process of documenting how these data were collected and compiled will move forward. By sharing geospatial data with others, particularly with the research community, it is likely data will be improved upon, and new products and applications will be developed; this, too, would benefit the USFS. Lastly, there are a number of ‘holes’ in the USFS’s GIS database, especially on state, private, and non-development lands, which could be addressed through better cooperation with other agencies and organizations.

III. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this MOU are:

To provide a framework for cooperation and coordination by the signatories to assure the establishment of the Southeast Alaska GIS Library and to accomplish the objectives outlined below.

The objectives of Southeast AK GIS Library are:
To provide reliable access to quality geospatial data for researchers, resource managers, and the public.

To foster cooperation and collaboration in the sharing, improvement, and acquisition of geospatial data.

To provide a mechanism for identifying and communicating the geospatial data needs of resource managers/researchers to administrators and decision-makers.

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. USFS will provide:

- Regular access to USFS geospatial data, including associated tabular data, for distribution through the Southeast Alaska GIS Library
- Metadata, data dictionaries, and other background information related to geospatial data
- Computer and GIS support when possible
- A representative to serve on the Southeast Alaska GIS Library steering committee

B. USFWS will provide:

- Regular access to USFWS geospatial data, including associated tabular data, for distribution through the Southeast Alaska GIS Library
- Metadata, data dictionaries, and other background information related to geospatial data
- Logistical (vehicles, equipment, personnel, etc) support when possible
- Computer and GIS support when possible
- A representative to serve on the Southeast Alaska GIS Library steering committee

C. ADFG will provide:

- Regular access to ADFG geospatial data, including associated tabular data, for distribution through the Southeast Alaska GIS Library
- Metadata, data dictionaries, and other background information related to geospatial data
- Personnel to coordinate project activities, including maintaining data currency, documenting holdings, filling data requests, working with the steering committee, and integrating new data sources
- Computer and GIS support when possible
- A representative to serve on the Southeast Alaska GIS Library steering committee
D. UAS will provide:

- Regular access to UAS geospatial data, including associated tabular data, for distribution through the Southeast Alaska GIS Library
- Metadata, data dictionaries, and other background information related to geospatial data
- Provide available computer infrastructure, including hardware and software, to store and distribute spatial data and related information
- Computer and GIS support when possible
- A representative to serve on the Southeast Alaska GIS Library steering committee

E. The Nature Conservancy will provide:

- Regular access to geospatial data published by The Nature Conservancy, including associated tabular data, for distribution through the Southeast Alaska GIS Library
- Metadata, data dictionaries, and other background information related to published geospatial data
- Computer and GIS support when possible
- A representative to serve on the Southeast Alaska GIS Library steering committee

V. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

This MOU defines the general terms upon which the USFS, USFWS, ADFG, UAS, and TNC will cooperate. Performance under the terms of this MOU is subject to the availability of funds and personnel resources through each Party’s respective funding procedures. This MOU is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Any endeavor or transfer of anything of value involving reimbursement or contribution of funds between the Parties will be handled in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and procedures and shall be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority.

VI. ENDORSEMENTS

Nothing in this MOU may be interpreted to imply that the United States, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Forest Service, the State of Alaska, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the University of Alaska and The Nature Conservancy endorses any product, service, or policy of the Southeast Alaska GIS Library. The Southeast Alaska GIS Library will not take any action or make any statement that supports or implies such an endorsement.
VI. EFFECTIVE DATE, MODIFICATION, AND TERMINATION

This MOU shall take effect upon the date of the last signature and shall remain in effect for a period of five (5) years. This MOU may be modified at any time upon joint approval and may be reviewed annually or at the request of either of the Parties. This MOU may be terminated at any time by mutual written agreement of the Parties, or by either Party upon 90 days written notice to the other Party.

VII. POINTS OF CONTACT

The following individuals will be the points of contact for this MOU:

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VIII. SIGNATURES

USDA FOREST SERVICE
TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

FORREST COLE
Forest Supervisor

Date 6.21.06

US DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bruce Halstead
Field Supervisor

Date 6/17/06

STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

MCKIE CAMPBELL
Commissioner

Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA
SOUTHEAST

Brendan Kelly
Dean of Arts and Sciences

Date 6/17/06

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF
ALASKA

T. David Banks
State Director

Date 4-3-06