

which has dominated Richard's attention ever since.

Using tips from local people and clues gleaned from aerial photos, Richard identifies intriguing stands and then paddles or skiffs around to have a closer look. The initial question of "Where are the big trees?" naturally led to the questions, "Why are they where they are?" and "What is their ecological significance?" With the help of John Caouette, a Forest Service statistician, Richard has devised a method of quantifying stands to compare one to the next. Combining the traditional skills of the field naturalist with the efficiency of computer modeling, Richard has produced 3-D images of forest structure for seventy sites across the Tongass. These images are pushing the Forest Service toward a more refined and informed management of the Tongass, vividly portraying ecological nuances obscured by reductive government-generated maps. For example, a small dense stand of trees has the same volume of timber as a stand of huge, widely spaced trees. Forest Service maps portraying timber volume fail to convey this critical ecological difference.

Richard has spent weeks in forests near towns throughout the region, locating pockets of surviving large spruces. For each town Richard has produced a handbook that leads readers on a self-guided, tree-by-tree tour, telling the story of the forest.

In a community landmark forest near Sitka, Richard explains to a group of locals that it takes more than time to grow big trees. Most big trees, like the ones towering over the group, grow on alluvial fans—coarse deposits left by moving water. The well-drained fans promote the deep roots needed to support huge trees. Over the centuries, these forests develop an ecological complexity not found in younger, denser, light-deprived stands. The older alluvial stands are characterized by gaps in the canopy that allow light to reach an understory of devil's club, salmon berry, and stink currant. Richard refers to these stands as "bear forests" since most are along streams and provide secluded fishing grounds for brown bears. His work calls attention to what we have lost—most alluvial stands, which hold the highest economic value to the timber industry, are already gone—and inspires protection of what remains.

Richard's artistic and observational gifts create a rare and needed view of the world, and his teaching skills are enhanced by his apolitical and nonjudgmental nature. He respects anyone who has authentic experience of the forest: logger, trapper, scientist, and naturalist alike. This respect is returned. Lured by his passion, people are drawn to see past rigid ideals and glimpse the beautiful complexity that entralls Richard. He is quiet in this role, preferring forest shade to public spotlight. And it is the trees and the critters who walk beneath them that benefit from his steady work.

HANK LENTFER is an activist and writer who lives in southeast Alaska.