

Central Tongass Project
Comments by Eric Lee

My name is Eric Lee. I am a resident of Petersburg, Alaska, located on Mitkof Island in the very central part of the Tongass National Forest. I am a third generation Alaskan commercial fisherman and subsistence hunter. Since 1902 my family has subsisted on deer and grouse from the forests and salmon from the streams on Mitkof Island.

Before large-scale logging and roading began in the 1960s, deer were very plentiful on Mitkof Island. The abundance of excellent low elevation deer habitat made the island a virtual deer factory. When large-scale logging and roading took place after the mid-'60s, the deer population plummeted. The deer season was closed for 17 years, and when it was reopened, was extremely limited, and remains so to this day.

The few places left that provide good habitat for deer on Mitkof Island will be eliminated by the deforestation caused by logging and roading that is proposed in the Central Tongass Project. Salmon streams will be negatively impacted by the combined damage of roading, deforestation, and the extreme weather events caused by climate change. In other places in the central Tongass, the proposed deforestation and roading will do serious damage to the forest that remains intact, and cause a loss of connectivity which is critical to the long-term survival of many species. The proposed roading and deforestation will further weaken the forest that remains, just when it needs to be stronger than ever to survive the endless extreme weather that is coming as climate change permanently worsens.

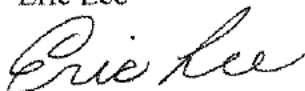
The Forest Service should abandon its Tongass Timber management, which now is just the same old "get out the cut" business as usual, and adopt an aggressive management plan to save the Tongass and our salmon streams from the coming weather extremes of climate change. To start, an inventory of salmon streams and their relative vulnerability to climate change should be done, and protective measures planned and implemented to protect all the streams that are most vulnerable. By not doing so, the Forest Service is derelict in its' duty to protect the forest.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Dept. of Agriculture to adopt the No Action Alternative.

The website portal for submitting public comments online has been non-operational, causing wasted time and inconvenience to myself and others trying to submit comments. The subsistence meetings where the public gave verbal testimony were not recorded by the presiding Forest Service officials. In this day of virtually free and effortless digital recording, there is no excuse for this lack of documentation of the public testimony given at the subsistence hearings. There is no explanation for this other than the obvious: that the decision-making Forest Service officials do not want to hear what the public has to say, and does not want a record of the testimony given. To the public, it gives the undeniable impression that they are participating in a sham process, that the meetings are simply held to satisfy the legal requirements of NEPA public process. I strongly object to this, and request that all future meetings where public testimony is invited be recorded and made available online for reference by the public and Forest Service employees as well.

Sincerely,

Eric Lee



September 16, 2019

