

Comments on proposed changes to the Roadless Rule for Alaska

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a resident of Sitka, Alaska, and grew up in the days of the 50-year contracts by the Forest Service for the pulp mill in my town. It turned out that the logging done in the 20th century was too much, and that the forest in this latitude grows back too slowly, and is too hard to access, so that only certain places were economical to log, places that also happened to have the highest value for fish and wildlife. The logging was also heavily subsidized by taxpayer dollars.

In Oregon they are logging on 3rd or even 4th growth trees, but in southeast Alaska the economical timber is old growth. Remaining old growth is valuable for wildlife, fish, hunting and recreation. It takes a lifetime before timber is harvestable, much less back to the condition of old growth. In addition, the decades of unsustainable logging did damage to habitat and left much of it fragmented.

Lifting the Roadless Rule (Alternative Six) would have the sole result of allowing clearcutting of old growth in areas currently protected. The DEIS states that there would be no more timber cut than is currently allowed. So volume would not change, just where it is cut (currently protected old growth).

The other purported benefits – connecting communities and allowing hydro and mine development – are already possible under the Roadless Rule, and every proposal for such projects has been approved.

Old-growth timber sales would create few jobs, and the benefit would all go out of state – Alaska's timber industry can't handle much volume, and the high value wood would be exported unprocessed. Those jobs are also by definition unsustainable because old growth takes hundreds of years to regenerate.

Compare that small benefit to the losses caused by renewed clearcutting of old growth in currently protected areas: this would cause habitat degradation for fish and wildlife, which harms the way of life in our region.

It is a threat to our actual economic drivers, fishing and tourism, which depend on intact natural ecosystems. The town of Sitka would see no benefit and only harm from logging in Roadless areas.

In addition, old-growth trees sequester carbon, an increasingly significant consideration.

In summary, there is no logical reason to lift the Roadless Rule for Alaska, and some excellent reasons not to – potential damage to our economy and our livelihoods, and to our natural environment, which Alaskans prize dearly.

The DEIS is also problematic. The proposal itself is disingenuous, which is reflected in the DEIS. According to the DEIS, there would be little or no harm because the same amount of timber would be cut as is currently allowed, and because the Forest Plan is to move to second growth harvest. If this were true, there would be no reason to lift the Roadless Rule; clearly the purpose is to cut more timber, presumably by making timber sales more attractive, and more cutting would obviously have an environmental impact.