



USAG'S MAIN PURPOSE IS TO PROTECT, SERVE AND ENHANCE SOUTHEAST ALASKA'S COMMERCIAL GILLNET FISHERY

Tongass Roadless Exemption Comments

United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters is a commercial fisheries advocacy group that represents the interests of 473 drift gillnetters in the SE region of the state of Alaska, which is surrounded by the Tongass National Forest. We have declined to choose an alternative from the 6 proffered, recognizing that our membership has greatly varying views on this particular issue. Roughly eighty percent of our fishery participants reside in the region.

Our common property fishing is managed on wild salmon. Habitat is vital to having healthy wild salmon stocks, and we would say that whatever alternative is chosen, that habitat protections instilled throughout the past 30 years be adhered to and practiced. Stream and watershed protections must be monitored to ensure any roads or logging will not impact viable, natural salmon runs that we depend on for our livelihood.

Furthermore, any past damage that has occurred and left unmediated should be of the highest priority, including replacement of culverts in old and existing roads that are constricting viable salmon habitat. Much of the opposition to this exemption has to do with the Forest Service's inability or lack of interest in mitigating past damages that could be having a deleterious effect on spawning and rearing habitat in certain locations. Consequently, we would recommend that the Forest Service address these long-standing issues as a matter of public trust. The Tongass National Forest is managed for multiple use, and it would be disingenuous to neglect water flows necessary for a healthy salmon environment that have been marginalized in past projects. Poor practices in the past haunt the logging industry, and while those poor practices have been addressed going forward, the ability to address damages from those poor practices has not. In an effort to diffuse the mistrust, we would recommend the Forest Service be proactive in making a keen effort to clean up messes from the past.

Sincerely,

Max Worhatch
Executive Director, USAG