

The Daily Sitka Sentinel

<http://sitkasentinel.com/7/2012-05-10-22-08-58/letters-to-the-editor/17512-november-3-2020-letters-to-the-editor>

November 3, 2020, Letters to the Editor

Details

Category: **Letters to the Editor**

Created on Tuesday, 03 November 2020 16:11

Hits: 47

Roadless Rule

Dear Editor: In recent news, the secretary of agriculture chose a “Full Exemption” for the Tongass National Forest as the final decision on the Alaska Roadless Rule. This decision directly opposes what was asked for by 96% of the public that participated in the public comment period, and blatantly ignores 100% of the testimony that was given at the hearing held here in Sitka last fall.

As a young person in Southeast Alaska, I have grown up in the Tongass National Forest. I love this region. In the time I have spent here, while exploring and foraging in the area, I have seen what the logging industry has done to the land. As I have cruised the many passages that link these scattered islands of the Tongass National Forest, the stark line between old-growth forest and the bright green scars of past clear-cuts and new growth is evident. I have traced the thick line of alders up hillsides of overpacked, small, and spindly trees. This line shows exactly where an old logging road had stretched. Just a few miles later, beyond the place where this bright green line ends, the forest will be dense and deep green-blue, naturally rolling back into the vast wildness of intact old-growth forest.

I know that the logging practices of the past have caused this border between forests, and I know that our leaders want logging to be opened up in the Tongass again. Our community is fueled off this forest, from our tourism industry to the fisheries and the subsistence usage. Without the Tongass and maintaining stands of ancestral forest, the region loses so much sustainable economic potential. Tourists flock from across the world to see the pristine wildlife and the towering trees of this vast temperate rainforest. Salmon rely on the streams and intact forest ecosystems to bring life to the rest of Southeast.

Eliminating the Roadless Rule is just the first step to open our forest back up to industrial scale and clear-cut old-growth logging. The full exemption of the Tongass from these protections does not help foster a transition to second-growth harvest or other more sustainable options that could already be attempted off of the existing road systems. Even one of the many options between “no action” and “full exemption” would be far preferable to this current decision because it would have shown at least an acknowledgment of our concerns and a desire to consider the impacts this might have on those of us who live here.

So after all the testimony and public comment, we seem to be forgotten in the midst of a whirlpool of political turmoil of Washington. As a young person, it is disappointing to see this democracy, a government supposedly of the people, without leaders who represent our interests or the courage to stand up for our region. Public opinion should have far more weight, and be a deeply considered factor in any resource management decision that impacts clean water, food security, culture, and our way of life.

So, in the future I hope that our leaders listen to our concerns and represent the people of this region, clearly valuing our forest and way of life. I want to see the future of the Tongass protected and guaranteed by those who are supposed to have our best interests in mind. Leaders who accept a civil duty to represent the people should follow through on that. I hope to see a sustainable future for Sitka and for Southeast Alaskans that ensures that future generations will have the opportunity to grow up the way I have, on the wild bounty of the Tongass National Forest.

Tava Guillory, Sitka