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First name: Dean

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello,

My name is Dean Rand. I'm the owner and Captain of the passenger vessel Discovery. My crew, myself along with my wife Megan, and my two daughters have been running overnight tours of up to a week in length in Prince William Sound under the business name Discovery Voyages for the past 23 years.

As a big part of our tours, we offer guided hikes and shoreline kayaks in the Chugach National Forest, including the Nellie Juan / College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, for up to 12 guests. I believe that our business is the oldest or 2nd oldest (behind the National Outdoor Leadership School) holder of a FS issued Special Use Permit for commercial use in the WSA.

Our business brings in well over \$1,000,000.00 per year to the local Alaskan economy, showing visitors the pure and unadulterated Alaska that they are seeking. Most of this money is in direct bookings where the visitors pay to cruise with us in Prince William Sound, indulge themselves in the incredible scenery that the Chugach National Forest offers water born visitors, and hike into the rich upland of the Forest. Take a short tour of our web site ([www.discoveryvoyages.com](http://www.discoveryvoyages.com)) and what you will notice is that yes, it is a "cruise" but notice that most of the pictures contain the incredibly rich backdrop of the Chugach National Forest, Nellie Juan / College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. If it wasn't for the rich wilderness that the Chugach National Forest/ WSA offers visitors, my business would not exist.

Chances are that whoever is reviewing this document doesn't even know that Discovery Voyages operates tours and guided hikes in the Chugach. This is more than likely due to the fact that we do not consume any public resources in our uses on the Chugach National Forest. We do not hunt, cut trees down, mine, or otherwise disturb the wild public resource that we depend on for our livelihood. Also, we try our best to not impact other visitors' wilderness experience. If we see that someone else is in the immediate area, we choose a different location. If there's been a great amount of rain recently, we may avoid areas that are prone to foot traffic damage. Additionally, we've installed the most quiet exhaust system available on our vessel Discovery and we try to anchor out of others' view. If we do inadvertently cross paths with other users, we apologize for impacting their wilderness experience, make friends, and go on our way.

However, with these following 4 changes, we've seen a rapid decline in that "sense of wilderness" that has been the hallmark of the Chugach National Forest/ Wilderness Study Area: 1) The opening of the Whittier train tunnel to regularly scheduled vehicle traffic allowing much greater access to Prince William Sound and the Chugach National Forest's 3,000 miles of easily accessible shoreline, 2) the advent of GPS electronic mapping & tracking making even the most inexperienced traveler (boater) an expert at finding their way around in this complex maze of islands & back channels that surround Chugach National Forest, 3) 4 stroke outboard technology which now allows boaters to travel much farther on a tank of gasoline, 4) the general increase in affluence for the recreating public of south central Alaska, which is at least half of the entire state population, who live only one hour away.

Today, because of the great increase in human traffic into the Sound and the forest, we've had to eliminate some of our favorite areas to visit. The negative impact on the environment from the increase in visitors has been tremendous, and we see it regularly. Irresponsible campers setting a base camp for weeks at a time and openly littering, latrines being located at prime shore landing areas, trails established from too much human traffic, campsites chosen in open bog environments that are easily disturbed and destroyed with any amount of foot traffic, not packing out what has been brought in to camp (barrels, tarps, latrine buckets, unburnable firewood, etc), chainsaw activities disturbing the wilderness setting both audibly and visually (cutting down 400 - 500 year

old trees which were the only trees growing in the bog, and by the way, are poor campfire material), are hard for our guests to ignore. This peatland bog environment is unique to Prince William Sound, and it takes years upon years to regrow the damaged bog terrain, and hundreds upon hundreds of years to regrow the dwarfed hemlocks. Some of these disturbances to the wild environment are caused by local recreation, some from commercial hunting activities.

Additionally, the large increase in hunting has taken its toll on wildlife populations. Before the road to Whittier opened, we would normally see 6 - 12 black bears on each 5 day tour. Today, we may see only that many bears in an entire year! I should also add that the only "complaint" that we ever get on our tours now go something like this: "Alaska is so beautiful, but where are all the bears?"

Needless to say, we oppose any further loss of wilderness or the "sense of wilderness" that the Chugach National Forest/WSA has provided our business and our guests for these many years.

As the Columbia Glacier continues its retreat, the Chugach National Forest lands opening up to foot exploration should continue to be managed as wilderness. The idea of removing this land from wilderness protections and allowing noisy, invasive, disturbing machines such as helicopters to ATV's or snowmobiles to use the public wild area for their for-profit business ventures is outrageous. Just imagine if you were camped near Columbia Glacier, enjoying the solitude of this wild place when a noisy helicopter lands in the same area and unloads a bunch of sightseers who are on a tight schedule to see all of Alaska in 2 days. Then, 15 minutes later, in comes another group, then another, and so goes your wilderness camping experience. Helicopter technology was developed for warfare, rescues, commercial logistics, etc., not wilderness tourism experiences.

Helicopter use negatively impacts my business. When we are drifting at the face of Columbia Glacier, and in comes several helicopters from Valdez on a tight flight schedule designed to maximize their profit, do you think that the operators really care about other users wilderness experience? They do not avoid impacting any other users wild experience and even violate FAA rules by flying in low and close (within 500 feet) to boats, which are visiting this same area. Many of these helicopter operators are already landing illegally on the National Forest WSA in the Columbia Bay area. A quick look at their marketing material shows one commercial operator with their machine parked on the WSA with Columbia Glacier in the background. They also greatly disturb the mountain goat population that lives precariously on the surrounding mountains. The boaters who venture into Columbia Bay to see the massive face of the glacier have to bear with being "buzzed" by these annoying and disturbing machines while they try to quietly await the glacier calving off a chunk of ice. Helicopter use is undoubtedly one of the most invasive and disturbing forms of human transportation. This use should not be allowed anywhere in the public domain where other outdoor enthusiasts or wildlife are present, whether wilderness designated or not.

As recreation traffic (personal & commercial) continues to increase throughout the Chugach National Forest/WSA due to the above mentioned facts, The Forest Service shouldn't be looking for ways to decrease the wilderness area, but instead increase the area. People do not come to Alaska's Prince William Sound and the Chugach National Forest to see other peoples trashed out camp sites, or cut down trees, or toilet holes, or hillsides destroyed by ATV tires, or helicopters, or jet skis, or mining sites, or logged over forests, or most forms of human activities. They come to see and experience the untouched wilderness that's like no place else in the world.

If Dean Rand can take a surplused - out 1957 Presbyterian Church Mission vessel and the Chugach National Forest, Nellie Juan / College Fiord Wilderness Study area and turn that into a million dollar year business for the past 23 years without leaving much more than a few footprints, then obviously wilderness is good for economic reasons. There's nothing in the way of there being 10 or 100 more Discovery Voyages except for one thing - the loss or otherwise degradation of that wilderness experience that people are paying, and will continue to pay for, to see and experience first hand.

Additionally, there are over a dozen other operators out of Whittier and Valdez that offer boating day tours of the untouched Wilderness areas in Prince William Sound. Although they mostly do not set foot on the uplands, they certainly are looking at, taking pictures of, and being smitten by the world class beauty offered by the wilderness mountains, glaciers, and shores of the Chugach National Forest, Nellie Juan / College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. A quick tally of these large day tour operations puts their local economic contributions at a rate of over \$125,000.00 per day, times a 4 ½ month season, which equates to close to 17 million dollars per year.

116 years ago, after spending over a week cruising and hiking in Prince William Sound where they discovered and named many of the WSA's mountains, fiords, and glaciers, the leading member of the Harriman Expedition, none other than John Muir himself, stated this about his time in the Sound and what was to become the Chugach National Forest, Nellie Juan / College Fiord Wilderness Study Area:

"Beauty in a thousand forms awaiting us at every turn.... it is full of glaciers of every description, waterfalls, gardens and grand old forests ... nature's best and choicest alpine treasures, purely wild, a place after my own heart". - John Muir, "Harriman Alaska Expedition, Volume 1", by Edward Henry Harriman, Clinton Hart Merriam; pg 132

That was how John Muir, the guy who had seen and done it all in the wild world of Alaska travels, sized up his visit to the Sound and the soon to be Chugach National Forest.

Listen to how Henry Gannett, founding member of the National Geographic Society, eloquently addressed the local assets in his final installment of his assessment of Alaska's natural resources during that same Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899:

"There is one other asset of the Territory not yet enumerated, imponderable, and difficult to appraise, yet one of the chief assets of Alaska, if not the greatest. This is the scenery. There are glaciers, mountains, and fjords elsewhere, but no where else on earth is there such abundance and magnificence of mountain, fjord, and glacier scenery. For thousands of miles, the coast is a continuous panorama. For the one Yosemite of California, Alaska has hundreds. The mountains and glaciers of the Cascade Range are duplicated and a thousand-fold exceeded in Alaska. The Alaska coast is to become the show-place of the Earth, and pilgrims, not only from the United States, but from far beyond the seas, will throng in endless procession to see it. It's grandeur is more valuable than gold or the fish or the timber, for it will never be exhausted. This value, measured by direct returns in money received from tourists, will be enormous; measured by health and pleasure it will be incalculable." - Henry Gannett, "Alaska: History, Geography, Resources" by Edward Henry Harriman, Clinton Hart Merriam; pg 276

Close to 25 years ago, then Chugach Forest Service District Ranger, Deidre St Louis asked me a significant question. While we were traveling south through Knight Island passage without another person or structure or sign of human presence in sight, she asked, "Captain Rand, what would you do if this was yours to manage?" , as she motioned towards the basalt mountains of Knight Island to the east and the snow capped peaks of the Kenai Mountains to the west. My response was quick because I had thought of this many times in the past. After all, this is public property, and I do have a say in its' management. My answer stands true today - "Leave it alone and manage it as The Wilderness Act of 64 set forth".

After now what's been 23 years in the small ship cruise business, I believe that I can speak for the over 5,000 visitors who have traveled with us on our extended tours in the Sound and the Chugach National Forest when I say that John Muir's words of over 100 years ago mirror the thoughts of today's visitor. Let's keep wilderness untouched, plentiful and for all to enjoy forever.

Let's keep wilderness wild.

Captain Dean Rand