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First name: J.

Last name: Capozzelli

Organization:

Title:

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Chugach National Forest

Supervisor's Office

Attn: Forest Plan Revision

161 East First Street, Door 8

Anchorage, AK 99501

I am writing because the Forest Service is entrusted to manage some of Alaska's most treasured wild lands in the Congressionally-designated two-million acre Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

The Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA on the Chugach National Forest in Alaska's western Prince William Sound is an ecological and scenic treasure. It is two million acres of ancient rainforest, wild salmon, and stunning mountains and glaciers. Its meandering fiords are laced with hundreds of remote islands. The area is critical to Alaskans for subsistence, commercial fishing, recreation, and the local tourism industry. It is a great place for tourists and families to visit.

So it is of much concern that the U.S. Forest Service just released a proposed plan for the Chugach to loosen protections throughout the area and permanently remove protections from some of its most important places. This will change protections that have been in place for almost 40 years and will hurt the wilderness character of this magnificent WSA.

Allowing residential timber harvests, expanded motorized uses, manipulation of habitats, mining, and helicopter-assisted skiing and hiking would harm this special Wilderness Study Area. Instead, the Forest Service should maintain current protections and recommend to Congress its perpetuation into the future.

I join with others in urging the Forest Service to:

- * Keep its longstanding promise to protect the wild character of the entire Wilderness Study Area until Congress finalizes its protection. This means maintaining and clarifying rules on all land-based motorized uses (including chainsaw use) and preserving the area's current undeveloped and non-motorized character.

- * Recommend the 1.9 million eligible acres of the WSA and surrounding roadless lands eligible for wilderness designation as Wilderness. Please do not abandon protection for the nearly 600,000 acres that are proposed to be eliminated from the WSA.

- * Reverse the recommendation to split the Wilderness Study Area into two smaller units. This would dramatically shrink the area by permanently stripping long-established protections for Knight Island, Columbia Glacier, Perry Island, Glacier Island, Culross Island, Esther Island, Port Wells, mainland Knight Island Passage, and Lake Nellie Juan.

- * Prohibit recreational snowmobile use in the WSA. Snowmobile use has exploded in the WSA in recent years. Snow machines for subsistence and traditional uses may be allowed, but please do not allow recreational snowmobile use. Noise and air pollution from snowmobiles affects not only wildlife but visitors as well. Please keep our natural wonders free from earsplitting racket and foul-smelling exhaust fumes.

- * Management of the WSA should follow the Forest Service's Regional Office WSA direction, since ANILCA

contains no substantive guidance on WSA protection.

Wilderness cleans the air and filters our water. It is where wildlife - large and small - feed, give birth, raise their young and migrate, sustaining the role each plays in nature's web of life. America's great wilderness lands are lands left basically untrammelled by humans, where wildlife does not merely survive, but thrives.

President Lyndon Johnson once made the following statement: "If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

President Theodore Roosevelt said (and sadly, it still pertains today), "We are, as a whole, still in that low state of civilization where we do not understand that it is also vandalism wantonly to destroy or to permit the destruction of what is beautiful in nature, whether it be a cliff, a forest, or a species of mammal or bird. Here in the United States we turn our rivers and streams into sewers and dumping-grounds, we pollute the air, we destroy forests, and exterminate fishes, birds and mammals... "

I urgently ask the Forest Service to maintain current protections and recommend to Congress its perpetuation into the future. This world-class wild area deserves permanent protection now and far into the future. Once a wilderness is destroyed, it is gone forever. Thank you for your help on behalf of this magnificent and special place. Once a wilderness is destroyed, it is gone forever.

Yours truly,

J. Capozzelli
New York, NY