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First name: Judith

Last name: Brakel

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I oppose removal of the Roadless rule from the Tongass National Forest. See attachment.

The following text was copy/pasted from an attached letter. The system cannot display the formatting, graphics, or tables from the attached original.

Roadless 2019

I oppose removal of the [ldquo]Roadless[rdquo] classification for the Tongass National Forest. The existing Roadless Rule provides for all the exceptions that are needed. Last week the Forest Service held a meeting here in Gustavus that was about the Roadless Rule. It was one of the most frustrating public meetings I[rsquo]ve ever attended. The 30 or 40 people there were quite unhappy. We understood that [ldquo]Alternative 6,[rdquo] complete removal of the Roadless Rule had already been chosen by our very unpopular Governor Dunleavy in discussion with President Trump, and supported by Senator Murkowski. This meeting was a terrible piece of fake public process.

Most of the land area in Southeast Alaska is in the Tongass National Forest, so the way the Forest Service manages the Tongass has been hugely important to this region. I[rsquo]ve lived basically my whole life in Southeast Alaska, in several communities, and traveled a lot around the region. Many of the region[rsquo]s inhabitants, and four generations of my family, have been engaged in opposing the Forest Service logging programs. We[rsquo]ve had some wins and got a blessed rest for about 15 years, but not recently. Now Gov. Dunleavy and the Alaska[rsquo]s representatives in Congress want to remove the [ldquo]Roadless[rdquo] status entirely from the Tongass. I can tell you that the [ldquo]grass roots[rdquo] are not with them on this. This split is nothing new. We[rsquo]ve almost never had Alaska[rsquo]s Congressman and Senators on our side. In the past they alleged that it was only big [ldquo]outside greenie organizations[rdquo] that wanted less logging. But in fact people not just from our larger towns, but from our region[rsquo]s tiny bush communities[ndash] from Point Baker, Token, Toms Place, Tenakee, Gustavus - have fought against the logging programs. Alaska Native Tlingit and Haida organizations and communities are opposing the removal of the Roadless Rule too.

Over time we[rsquo]ve been fed a series of myths about Tongass timber. For years during the Tongass pulp mill era the Forest Service told us that we needed to cut down these [ldquo]decadent old-growth trees[rdquo] so that we could have [ldquo]vigorous young growth.[rdquo] Regrowth of trees turned out to be slower than they expected. But now that we have a certain amount of [ldquo]young growth,[rdquo] nobody wants to buy it. When I stated that near the end of the 2018 Roadless meeting you could see in the general reaction (staff and all) a recognition of [lsquo]Yes, myths and myths![rsquo] A pro-timber industry study done in 2014 or 2015 for an Obama Administration[rsquo]s plan to shift Tongass logging to second growth interviewed about 18 timber operators, who said that 2nd growth needs another 150 (or more) years of growth to become valuable. We learned from FS staff that second growth can only be harvested at a profit if all of it is exported abroad in the round. How was that supposed to do something for our region[rsquo]s economy?

The timber harvest and processing industry now constitutes less than 1% of employment and earnings in Southeast Alaska. When the pulp mills closed there was an exodus of many who were primarily timber industry workers. We no longer have a set of people waiting hopefully for a revival of the timber economy. What we have instead is some important economic sectors [ndash] fishing and tourism [ndash] that would likely be damaged by a timber industry revival.

Somewhere in Forest Service literature there's a sentence — I believe this is an exact quote: "The greatest threat to the salmon resource is the roads." You may be aware of the 1995 Forest Service Alaska Region publication of the interagency and interdisciplinary study, Anadromous Fish Habitat Assessment. This study showed that the timber program was seriously deficient in its protections, even after the Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990 had improved stream protections. Similar protections had been found inadequate to protect salmon habitat in the Pacific Northwest. A special concern was that if ever a period of stream habitat degradation coincided with a time of poor ocean conditions, a situation of "double jeopardy," the likely result would be high, long-term risk of extinction.

We are arriving at an era of double jeopardy now. The ocean is warming, and become more acidic (ocean acidification is especially severe in Gulf of Alaska waters). In the freshwater habitat the new situation of droughts and predictions that rain will come less gently and more in occasional torrents mean the stream habitat is or will be more fragile. Freshwater streams are sometimes too warm, killing salmon, a concern especially high for species like coho that spend more than one year rearing in small streams. There is lots of reason to worry about salmon. More roads and logging projects will unquestionably make the freshwater habitat worse.

Further, the remaining old growth forests on the Tongass are a precious asset in this era, both as examples of the values of wilderness and as major carbon sinks, significant at the national level.

[Position]

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