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First name: Katie

Last name: Riley

Organization: salmon fishermen and women of Southeast Alaska

Title:

Comments: Final Copy of the Fisherman's letter - comment on Alaska Roadless Rule

Please submit this letter, signed by 254 Southeast Alaskan fishermen, to the Alaska Roadless Rule comment record.

Thank you

Katie

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Katie Riley

Policy Engagement Director

Sitka Conservation Society

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

We are commercial fishermen who live and work

in the Tongass National Forest. We represent various gear

groups that participate in Southeast salmon fisheries, including

seine, troll, and gillnet. Some of us are just breaking into the industry;

some of us have carried on a family tradition over generations. All of us are

invested in smart, sustainable stewardship of the resources, lands, and waters

that sustain our industry and the people of Southeast Alaska. The future of our

industry, our lifestyle, our ability to feed our families and the American people, all depends

upon the salmon populations that are supported by the clean water and healthy, intact fish

habitat of the Tongass. We are thus concerned about the release of the Draft Environmental

Impact Statement for the Alaska Roadless Rulemaking process and the potential effects of a full

exemption on Tongass salmon habitat. Please protect our livelihoods and Alaska's salmon

spawning grounds by selecting an alternative that broadly protects fish habitat,

continues the phase-out of industrial scale old growth clear-cutting, and prioritizes

the restoration of degraded watersheds and streams.

Commercial fishing is the economic backbone of Southeast Alaska. There are troll permit holders living in every single community in Southeast Alaska. 80% of all the Southeast salmon permit holders - trollers, seiners, and gillnetters - are Alaskan residents. We are small business owners that support our local communities year-round. One in ten jobs in Southeast is in the seafood industry, and we contribute 10% of all regional employment earnings. According to a McDowell report on the Economic Value of the Alaskan Seafood Industry (2013), these percentages equate to direct employment of 13,500 individuals and an estimated \$321 million in labor income in the Southeast region alone.

Decisions made on the basis of maps in Washington D.C. have palpable implications for our lifestyles and livelihoods. Our livelihoods rely on the health of the salmon, and salmon are reliant upon the health of the Tongass National Forest; these streams and rivers produce 80% of the commercial salmon harvested from Southeast Alaska each year. We are economically invested in the protection of the top salmon-producing watersheds on the Tongass, as well as the health of the forest ecosystem. Industrial-scale logging negatively impacts fish habitat

with region-wide effects, and we are concerned about the effects that a new Alaska Roadless Rule could have on our industry and the resource we depend upon.

There are

many challenges

facing salmon populations

that are beyond our control,

such as changing ocean

conditions, climate change and ocean

acidification, and treaty agreements. By

contrast, the fate of the Alaska Roadless Rule

is well within your control. By conserving the

most valuable and productive watersheds for fish

production, the 2001 Roadless Rule is working for us. As

you weigh your decision about the Alaska Roadless Rule, we

collectively urge you to keep the Tongass Transition on track and  
phase out old growth logging; protect the T77 and TNC/Audubon  
areas and the other top salmon-producing watersheds in the forest, especially those on  
northern Prince of Wales Island; and urge the Forest Service to invest in stream rehabilitation  
and watershed restoration with the goal of improving salmon habitat and salmon production.

We advocate for these management prescriptions as a start, but we maintain that they are nowhere near sufficient. The T77 proposal excludes many of the most productive salmon streams on the Tongass, especially those on Prince of Wales Island, which contains a third of Southeast's most productive salmon streams. Prince of Wales is also the island that has sustained the worst impacts from the logging industry, both historically and at present. The island and the productivity of the anadromous waters on it will continue to suffer if the 2001 Roadless Rule protections are removed. With the future of Southeast Alaska's most important resource at risk, the Forest Service must work harder to protect and restore productivity in all the anadromous waters of Southeast Alaska, from the waters located in intact habitat as well as those in previously-degraded habitat.

In closing, as much as salmon fishing is our economic livelihood, it is also our way of life. We live in the communities that we fish out of, and we are invested in the economic, social, and ecological prosperity of these communities. We need to strengthen and protect the Tongass National Forest in order for it to keep it producing salmon for local economies, our families, our communities, and the next generation of fishermen. This forest supports a way of life that is unique across the world. We depend on the forest, we are important stakeholders, and our economic contributions to Southeast Alaska need to be recognized. Please select an alternative to the Alaska Roadless rule that prioritizes protecting and sustaining the Southeast salmon resource and its habitat in perpetuity. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, The dedicated salmon fishermen and women of Southeast Alaska

[Attachment contains images and signatures from 254 Southeast Alaskan fishermen]

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