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First name: Cheryl

Last name: Fecko

Organization:

Title:

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

December 16, 2019

To whom it may concern:

I am submitting my final comments in support of keeping the Roadless Rule in place for the Tongass National Forest, and specifically for Prince of Wales Island. I have voiced these concerns along with thousands of others supporting roadless protections for what remains of the temperate old growth forests on our continent. At this point in our history we should be enacting greater protections, not fewer.

I came to Prince of Wales Island as a teacher 37 years ago, commercial fished during the summers, and continue to work, recreate and harvest the bounties of the forest and ocean. It is my home. I have participated in hearings and public meetings over TTRA, TLMP, the end of the 50 -year pulp mill contracts, Roadless Rule decisions, local timber sales, and more recently as a member of the POWLLAT.

The decision by Secretary Perdue, favoring total exemption from the Roadless Rule, rather than making an attempt to consider the thousands of comments in support of keeping the Roadless Rule or even the year-long efforts of a state assigned working group seeking an Alaska specific rule is disheartening. But more than this it makes people feel that their voices do not matter, and that participating in the public process is futile and determined by politics not what is best for the forest and the people who live there.

I truly fear the impacts of opening roadless areas to increased old growth timber harvest, road building, and habitat degradation, especially on Prince of Wales Island, which has seen the heavy hand of industrial scale logging for over 5 decades.

Even with the Roadless Rule in place roads are being built on Prince of Wales Island and clearcut logging of old growth is still happening, but at least some critical deer and wildlife habitat will be kept intact with a Roadless Rule in place.

For decades Prince of Wales Island supplied timber for the pulp mills. We have over 1000 miles of roads that carve up habitat and expanses of dark young growth in stem exclusion stage that provide little valuable habitat for deer and other wildlife. For those of us who depend on the remaining old growth to sustain deer and other

important wildlife species for future generations, exempting the Tongass and more specifically Prince of Wales Island means continued fragmentation of critical deer habitat, especially critical winter habitat. We are already seeing a decline in the island's deer population.

Old growth habitat has and is being harvested at least on Prince of Wales Island by Mental Health Trust, the University of Alaska, Sealaska, Native village corporations, and State owned forests. These private lands are clearcut and managed for a single use, timber production. More attention should be given to the impacts of these clearcut lands adjacent to public land, and the fragmentation that they create.

Prince of Wales Island has made its sacrifice for the timber industry. Rather than trying to find ways to return the Tongass to the logging practices of the past the Forest Service and the State should be looking to the future, to a more sustainable way of doing business. We should look at the contribution of fishing and the

independent travel industry to the economy of Southeast Alaska. We should promote and foster industries that actually depend on the values of an intact old growth forest, and support small-scale timber sales and selective harvesting practices.

Prince of Wales Island and other rural areas within the Tongass National Forest are different from other regions of the country. We don't want to be compared to Idaho or Colorado to look for ways to care for and manage our public land. Our lives are more connected to and there is a greater reliance upon the fish, wildlife, and plants that we harvest and the habitat they require. I urge the Forest Service, Secretary Perdue, Governor Dunleavy, our Congressional delegation, and President Trump to keep the Roadless Rule protections in place for the Tongass and select the NO ACTION Alternative.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these comments.

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