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Title:

Comments: The Honorable Randy Moore

Chief, U.S. Forest Service

United States Forest Service Sidney R. Yates Federal Building

201 14th St SW

Washington, DC. 20227

Linda Walker

Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination

U.S. Forest Service

201 14th Street SW

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Washington, DC 20250-1124

Janelle Crocker

Acting Regional Forester, Alaska Region (R10)

U.S. Forest Service

P.O. Box 21628

Juneau, AK 99802-1628

Re: Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System
#65356

Dear Chief Moore, Ms. Walker and Ms. Crocker:

Thank you for allowing public comment on the U.S. Forest Service's notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to provide direction for old-growth forest conditions across the National Forest System. Alaska Wilderness League, with our members and supporters, urge the Forest Service to remove the Tongass National Forest exemption from any further analysis in the upcoming EIS. This exemption, described in the fourth standard in the notice of intent, allows old-growth logging to continue where "necessary to allow for implementation of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy" (SASS). Allowing this loophole is inconsistent with the purpose of this land management plan direction, and unnecessary for the Tongass.

The nationwide land management plan amendment addressed by this scoping intends to maintain, develop, and recruit old-growth forest conditions, by addressing the need to improve conservation of old-growth forests across the National Forest System. The Tongass in southeast Alaska contains some of the best and largest temperate old-growth forests left anywhere in the world. While so much has already been lost, the remaining old-growth in the Tongass provides substantially more carbon storage and sequestration than any other national forest, making protection of these trees essential for addressing the climate crisis. Alaska's salmon, wildlife, people, and economy all depend upon old-growth habitat in the Tongass. It's vital these irreplaceable old-growth forests are fully protected.

We applaud the positive direction the SASS outlines for the future of the Tongass, and no exemption from this national land management planning direction is needed to ensure that its aims can be achieved. Under the SASS, the Forest Service has restored the Roadless Rule in the Tongass and begun to shift its resources to support and invest in forest restoration, recreation, and resilience throughout the region. We support these positive changes in how the Forest Service stewards these areas of southeast Alaska and believe that including protection for the remaining old-growth, through this national forest plan amendment, is a critical next step.

We would like to prevent a future administration, under the Tongass exemption as proposed, from returning to clearcutting tens of millions of board feet of Tongass old-growth annually by simply revising the SASS goals with no public process. Tongass old-growth forests, like the rest of the nation's old-growth, need permanent protection and should not be exempted from this national action. On behalf of Alaska Wilderness League, and our members and supporters in Alaska and nationwide, we submit the following 7,773 signatures that signed on to the following language:

The Tongass in Southeast Alaska contains some of the best and largest temperate old-growth forests in the world. Its trees should be protected alongside all the others in the nation. Do not exempt the Tongass from this outstanding new plan to protect America's remaining old-growth forests.

Sincerely,

Maddie Halloran

Alaska State Director

Alaska Wilderness League

ATTACHMENT: 02 02 2024 AWL comments for Tongass.xlsx petition signed by 7,773 people