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First name: LeeAnn

Last name: Bennett

Organization:

Title:

Comments: February 15, 2016

Dear Chugach National Forest,

The Congressionally-designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA) on the Chugach National Forest in Alaska's western Prince William Sound is an ecological and scenic treasure. It includes two million acres of ancient rainforest, wild salmon, and stunning mountains and glaciers. Its meandering fiords are laced with hundreds of remote islands. And the area is critical to Alaskans, for subsistence, commercial fishing, recreation, and the local tourism industry. It is also a great place to visit by yourself or with the family if you want to truly experience wilderness.

The plan recently proposed for the Chugach by the U.S. Forest Service will loosen protections throughout the area and permanently remove protections from some of its most important places. If this plan is adopted, it will strip protections that have been in place for almost forty years and will seriously hurt the wilderness character of this magnificent WSA. The proposed Chugach plan would also allow residential timber harvests, expanded motorized uses, manipulation of habitats, mining, and helicopter-assisted skiing and hiking. National Forests exist on public lands and it is my opinion that these lands are to be protected and preserved for everyone, not just individuals who want to exploit the land for its resources. This land belongs to all Americans and it should be maintained in its wild state, I mean that is what a wilderness study area is for, the study of wilderness and the wilderness experience.

I request that the Forest Service does the following:

- \*Keeps 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.

- \*Recommends the 1.9 million eligible acres of the WSA and surrounding roadless lands be eligible for wilderness designation as Wilderness. Please do not abandon protection for the nearly 600,000 acres you propose to eliminate from the WSA.

- \*Reverses the terrible 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.

- \*Prohibits 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 recreational snowmobile use is not and it will degrade the wild character of this area.

- \*Management of the WSA should follow the Forest Service's Regional Office WSA direction, since ANILCA contains no substantive guidance on WSA protection.

In the Chugach National Forest, the Forest Service has been entrusted to manage some of Alaska's most treasured wild lands in the Congressionally-designated 2 million-acre Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA. Changing that now-by allowing residential timber harvests, expanded motorized uses, manipulation of habitats, mining, and helicopter-assisted skiing and hiking-would harm this beautiful Wilderness Study Area. It defies common sense. Instead, the Forest Service should 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, for all Americans!

Thank you for this opportunity to express my comments on this proposed plan.

Sincerely,

LeeAnn Bennett

Wilderness supporter