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Organization: Wild Chugach National Forest Defenders

Title:

Comments: I am writing on behalf of the Wild Chugach National Forest Defenders, a loosely-knit ad-hoc group of Americans with Alaska roots who strongly believe that our nation's second largest national forest deserves the best recommendations for Wilderness Area status possible.

Specifically, I urge you to recommend the entire Nellie Juan-College Fjord Congressional Wilderness Study Area (approx. 2 million Acres) plus adjacent wild lands within the Snow River (northern watersheds) and greater Paradise Lakes Valley Watersheds for designation by Congress as truly wild and worthy components of our National Wilderness Preservation System.

For too long now, we have witnessed the steady erosion of wilderness values within this WSA primarily due to your agency's lack of mindful management of the WSA. Additionally, with each successive Forest Plan Revision you have continued to recommend less and less of the WSA for Wilderness Area Status. Taken together, your agency has failed to uphold the letter and spirit of the law (Alaska Lands Act of 1980) that established this WSA and have undermined the original intent of the WSA ---- which was to retain the WSA's wilderness character until Congress finally decided to designate the area as Wilderness. A number of comments have been presented to you which detail these failures on your part. I will not repeat them here.

What I will say is that your agency can still make amends for your past wrongs regarding management of the WSA and recommendations for Wilderness. This time around you can finally give this WSA the justice she deserves. Instead of proposing to hack away Knight Island, and other incredible parts of the WSA from possible future Wilderness Area status....you need to honor this special part of wild Alaska and recommend the entire WSA for Wilderness, with the additions of the aforementioned wild landscapes of the northern Snow River and Paradise Lakes Valley watershed country.

I could go on and on about how each area and acre of the WSA (and beyond) should be recommended for Wilderness Area designation by your office. Instead I will endorse official comments by the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the Alaska Wilderness League, and the technical comments by Wilderness Watch.

Please review these comments with great care. And please be mindful that our second largest (and most underrated) national forest is a shining example of all that's good and right about our wild public lands and national forests but tragically does not contain a single acre of Congressionally-designated Wilderness. You and your agency can finally take some positive actions to fix this situation by doing what's good and right for the Wild Chugach National Forest. And as you do so, please remember those patriotic words from Olaus Murie and Edward Abbey (written in 1954 and 1969) "God Bless America. Let's save more of her."

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Bart Koehler

(For the Wild Chugach National Forest Defenders)