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Comments: Comments of the Proposed Revised Land Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest

The Chugach National Forest is a unique federal land management area because it includes one of the most biologically diverse and spectacular scenic areas in the state of Alaska and a potential wilderness area, the Prince William Sound. This was recognized over thirty years ago when Congress under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 established the Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area. Unfortunately, since that time the increasing human population in southcentral Alaska and increasing human access into Prince William Sound has begun to degrade the wilderness character of the area and the U.S. Forest Service is slowly losing the opportunity to protect the area as wilderness as initially intended by Congress.

I thus urge the U.S. Forest Service to advance a wilderness proposal or recommendation to Congress for the Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area as a part of this current plan revision before further degradation of the wilderness character occurs within this area, a degradation that is likely to increase as the human population and access to the area increases. Furthermore, to address this increasing degradation of potential wilderness and to protect its wilderness character, I recommend the U.S. Forest Service through this revised plan significantly increase its current protection of the Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area with new standards, guidelines and regulations. These standards, guidelines and regulations should specifically address human wilderness-degrading activities such as the unauthorized building of structures, establishment and locations of campsites, littering, disposal of human waste, use and locations of bear baiting stations, and the apparent high rate of exploitation of bears.

There should also be more emphasis on the importance of maintaining ecologically-functional wildlife movement corridors in the forested valley bottoms within the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area of the Chugach National Forest and provide a map of the corridors in the plan. Such corridors allow for the movements of several species of wildlife dependent of forest habitat between mainland Alaska and the entire Kenai Peninsula thus helping to maintain genetically diverse wildlife populations on the nearly island-like Kenai Peninsula. Future development and human activities within these corridors, if not addressed, could diminish their effectiveness as wildlife movement corridors in the future leading to increasing genetically isolated wildlife populations. Finally, in describing the habitat and wildlife diversity within the Kenai Peninsula Geographic Area of the Chugach National Forest (page 15) the description should also include mountain goats in alpine habitat and lynx in forested valleys habitats.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Revised Land Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest.

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