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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Comments on proposed road closures

I am commenting on the proposed road closures on Wrangell Island. I was unaware of the original discussions back in 2007 or 2009 when the last closures occurred. I found out about the issue after hunting season began and I headed out to my long used hunting areas and could no longer realistically access those hunting areas because the roads were destroyed. It was a very big disappointment then and this new information I just learned about is just as bad. I also don't own an ATV so the ATV only proposed roads are not much use for me, although many others I know will be able to use them.

For a little background, I use the existing logging roads for access to subsistence hunting of deer and moose. I also hunt grouse in the spring time. I have two boys that are just turning into teenagers and finally old enough to start out hunting. Wild game is a large part of our diet. These roads give access to hunting grounds that otherwise could not be reached, especially with children. Hunting on Wrangell is difficult enough and removing access to these side valleys makes it much more difficult. I don't just drive the roads looking for animals, I use these roads to get me to starting points where I can hike in. I am familiar with many other Wrangell hunters that do the same thing, using these roads for hunting access to areas away from the main high traffic roads.

After your last road destruction process I lost hunting grounds for moose hunting. When moose hunting it is not a simple pack out like it is with a deer. Moose packing requires about four packs with a small moose and probably a couple more packs with a large moose. If you have to walk a mile up a painfully steep and water barred road only to hike another mile into the woods, not once but six times with a heavy pack, you can see why these areas are no longer realistic for moose hunting.

I have reviewed your proposed alternative road maps of Wrangell Island and will focus on what I am told is the preferred Alternative 2 map. My biggest concern that personally affects me, and several others, is the closing of the lower section of the 50024 (Lower Basin) Road. This road has been in place and used as a local hunting area since the 1980s, giving access to the south side of the valley. This road in use with the northern upper road (6263) is a large part of my hunting strategy in this area. Any game taken from the upper steep sided road or at the head of the valley can be packed out to this lower easier accessing road. This area is also a great place for hunting with younger hunters as the second road acts as a safety net. This is the only place on the island like this and destruction of either road will take these features away. I can also personally state that this road is used by people picking berries in the summer, by hunters looking for bear in the spring, by hunters in the fall looking for deer and moose, and also by local people looking for their season's firewood stock. This road is only a few miles from the paved highway which also makes it appealing for us low budget subsistence hunters because it does not take as much gas to travel.

I would also like to comment on the 50009 road. This is a road that I used to hunt from before the road was destroyed. Although I still hunt it to some degree, I can no longer realistically reach the hunting grounds I used to

from the end of the road just because of the new starting point. I see that you have plans to open the lower half of the road to allow access to a new logging unit. I would like to see you leave this lower part of the 50009 road open to vehicle use after it has been fixed and used. This would make hiking into and hunting the upper area realistic again for not just deer and moose in the fall but also grouse hunting with children in the spring. Just this half a road will make a difference.

I don't really approve of closing access roads in general but these two roads are of importance to me and I would like your consideration in keeping these roads open for access. My observation of the current No Action plan and the proposed Alternative 2 is that other than the main road system, there will be very few remaining vehicle roads that take you away from the high use areas. And unfortunately because of that fact, my existing hunting areas will receive much more hunting use and pressure.

I would also like to mention that if you can find a way to advertise these issues and meetings in a way that everyone can see them, that would be helpful. Of the few people I have spoken to about this issue, none of them had any idea road closures were happening.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I hope you give honest consideration about how your decision will affect my livelihood as well as the livelihood of many other Wrangell outdoorsman.

Bruce Smith

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