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Comments: Comments on the Forest Service's (FS's) Draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest (NF)

I am a retired environmental engineer who has enjoyed much time in Wilderness and National Forest areas in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Alaska. Additionally, I have volunteered in trail restoration efforts in the Weminuche Wilderness and San Juan National Forest. Please know that preserving Wilderness and National Forest areas throughout the entire United States are of great importance to me.

As you know, the spectacular, Congressionally-designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is an ecological and scenic treasure - nearly two million acres of ancient rainforest, wild salmon, and stunning mountains and glaciers within meandering fiords laced with hundreds of remote islands.

The following constitutes my comments on the above referenced draft Plan.

The FS's draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest must protect the "wilderness" character of the WSA, rather than the Forest Service's (FS's) suggestion of protecting its "existing" character. Additionally, the Management Plan must protect the wilderness character of the lands in the WSA by classifying all of the WSA with the FS's "primitive" recreational standard.

The FS must restore strong protection of all the lands within the WSA that the federal government purchased on behalf of the public as compensation for the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. These lands were specifically acquired for the restoration of "wilderness values" and are required to be managed "in perpetuity for conservation and wilderness purposes," as the government promised when purchased.

Further, the FS must address ongoing illegal recreational chainsaw use in the WSA. This illegal use of chainsaws has resulted in tree removal and other damage along dozens of wilderness beaches, including some in ecologically sensitive areas.

The FS's Alternative D includes designating the maximum amount of land for Wilderness of any of the Alternatives (97 percent of the WSA, or 1.884 million acres). I support a modified Alternative D which would include a wilderness recommendation that also encompasses Lake Nellie Juan and all the lands within the WSA boundary that were purchased for wilderness resource restoration following the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments on this most important draft Land and Resource Management Plan.