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Organization:

Title:

Comments: The Chugach National Forest has become profoundly dear to me. I've lived in interior Alaska for 30 years. Lately, I've had opportunities to spend many weeks adventuring in Prince William Sound. I have sailed, kayaked, hiked, skied, and snowshoed in a variety of places in the WSA and the eastern part of the Sound. I've spent joyful hours with binoculars watching humpback whales, Dall porpoises, orcas, bald eagles, harlequin ducks, scooters, Kittlitz's and marbled murrelets, and a myriad other shorebirds and waterfowl as my partner and I sailed throughout the Sound. I've hiked for hours in the rain beneath dripping branches of Sitka spruce, western and mountain hemlock, saturated in the scents and sounds of that ancient rainforest. I've felt the chill billow off Columbia Glacier, the air awash with gulls and terns, my heart thrumming with the wild beats of so many birds aloft. My time in the wilderness of Prince William Sound and the Chugach National Forest has changed my life.

I believe we must care for this rare, ecological treasure, protect and preserve it for what it offers us now, in the 21st century, and for future generations. Our planet is changing at a rapid rate. Humans have drastically altered ecosystems and the flora and fauna that depend on healthy habitats. We have the chance to be responsible stewards of this wilderness, of the myriad gifts it offers us, both intrinsic and extrinsic. We have the chance, here in the Chugach National Forest, to preserve and protect an extraordinary place on our planet. We must.

Why do I feel so adamant about this? Because of experiences like these:

Scrambling through alder brush and devil's club, menziesia and blueberry bushes to the highest point on Glacier Island, I was astonished by the expansive 360° view of ocean, mountains, glaciers, and forest spread out before me. I watched humpback whales spouting in the distance as the wind eddied around me and felt grateful for the chance to feel the wild world thrumming.

Climbing the rocky hillsides of Jackson Cove (Glacier Island), sweating in summer sun, my partner and I were graced with the appearance of a Sitka black-tailed deer. I held my breath as she stared, unflinching, then suddenly bounded away into the forest. How often in a lifetime is a person given the gift of a serendipitous encounter with a wild creature? Later, we camped on the shore of a small lake perched high on the island, watched a female goldeneye teach her seven chicks how to feed. We swam in the crystal-clear water, inhaled the fragrance of myriad wildflowers, slept peacefully in that tranquil sanctuary.

Paddling through the skookumchuck of Eagle Lagoon (Glacier Island), I was thrilled to see dozens of sea otters tumbling in their thigmotactic antics. What a delight. Bald eagles whisked around us. Varied thrushes called from the forest. So much life pulsing.

Sailing by Bull Head (Glacier Island), I was astounded by Stellar sea lions, their grunts and bellows echoing from the rocky beach. Where else in the world could a person view wildlife like this, feel the power and wonder?

My partner and I spent ten days anchored in Deep Water Bay last April. We snowshoed and cross-country skied into the expansive basin of rock and ice that unfolds above timberline. We followed wolverine tracks across the snowy expanse between groves of hemlock, crossed a rock-strewn creek with dippers bobbing in and out of the icy water, then skied up onto the Contact Glacier. From there we could look down into Nellie-Juan Fjord. A breathless view. An exquisite place. A few days later, we kayaked into the fjord, surrounded by scooters and murrelets, seals, and three orcas. Sheets of water sluiced off the granite walls, the rumbles of calving ice echoed around us. We were humbled and enthralled by the interconnectedness of it all.

Gliding into Copper Bay (Knight Island) in July, surrounding by moon jellies, mesmerized by their ethereal

beauty, I felt the pulse of ocean life, the vast beauty under the hull of our boat. Leaving the shore, we hiked around muskeg ponds, then up through hemlock forest to an alpine lake where we watched spotted sandpipers feeding along the shore. The memory of this place and the solace I felt there is palpable, even now, months later.

Paddling in one of Jack Bay's coves, I watched a family of river otters playing in the placid water then scramble onto shore. Looking into the trees, I counted 35 bald eagles perched regally in the trees skirting the creek where thousands of salmon were pulsing their way upstream to spawn. Chestnut-backed chickadees flitted in the hemlocks and harlequin ducks rested on the far shore. All this in one moment.

Because of these experiences and many more, I support Alternative D or any other combination that creates formal Wilderness designation for as much of the Chugach National Forest as possible, especially one that includes Glacier Island. I also support backcountry, semi-primitive, winter non-motorized designation for the Jack Bay watershed. I believe it is vital that the Forest Service provide lasting protection for the Chugach National Forest, its plethora of plants and animals, the wilderness values that offer solace and sustenance for current visitors, like myself, and generations of visitors that will journey there in the future. My hope is that they will have opportunities like I have had to feel deep connections to one of Alaska's unique wilderness areas.

Sincerely,
Susan Campbell