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Organization:

Title:

Comments: roadless rule for tongass

As a lifetime Alaskan, I am strongly opposed to changing the roadless rule.

I am a subsistence hunter and have always fed my family with venison caught in the Tongass. If you are wondering how important subsistence hunting is to people here, know that there are about 70,000 people living in the Tongass and we eat about 40,000 deer a year. About 45% of people live in Juneau, where subsistence hunting is not allowed, so you can see that in the other communities, hunting is vital. Deer can not overwinter in second growth if there is a year of heavy snow. It takes too many calories for them to walk in deep snow and the total stem exclusion caused by logging chokes out underbrush they need to survive in the winter. In areas like Hoonah that have allowed extensive clear cutting, hundreds of carcasses rot on the beaches when the snow melts after a hard winter. Most of the old growth in the Tongass has already been logged. I live in Sitka and hunt all over this region. I often cross through second growth while hunting and can assure you these are dead zones that are very difficult to navigate for man (or in this case, woman) or beast.

We all understand that logging here has never been about profit. Road building is so expensive, logging jobs need to be heavily subsidized. I say if we need more timber industry jobs, they should be reconstruction jobs and not logging. The original loggers used our streams as roads or cleared them of debris after so salmon fry have no habitat. Thinning the second growth would speed up the recovery of the forest. There is much stream restoration to be done to repair the damage left by previous logging. I also understand that only a handful of people still rely on logging for employment. These mills need to transition to second growth. If 50 years is not time enough to grow viable trees for local mills, then we have no business treating the Tongass like a tree farm. When you compare the number of people who rely on fishing and tourism to the number who work at mills, clearly logging the Tongass threatens the livelihoods of thousands to provide short term employment to dozens. It makes no sense!

When we heard the Amazon was burning this summer we all condemned leadership there for being short sighted. The Amazon is the lungs of the planet. Well so is the Tongass. The trees here hold 8% of the carbon on the planet. Cutting the old trees releases vast quantities of carbon and removes our biggest consumers of carbon. Why would we do something so short-sighted? History will look back on the decision to log the Tongass in disbelief that we could be so selfish. Please reconsider lifting the roadless rule. Locals want the Tongass to remain as it is. We hunt, fish and recreate in the Tongass. Old growth is vital to our way of life. Leave it be!

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Occupation: mediator

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[Position]