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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Scott Bowler and I live in both Sitka, Alaska and Sisters, Oregon. Since 1982 we have been working here part time and seasonally, primarily in eco-tourism, and in health care in native villages and health centers. We personally depend on the forest for our recreation, and are frequently hiking, fishing, gathering berries and mushrooms, and enjoying the unspoiled landscape. We see also the tremendous importance of the forest for meeting the sustenance and spiritual needs of the native peoples in the tribes that we serve. Finally, there's a huge financial benefit from the tourism that values this pristine and wild ecosystem.

I am writing a comment on the Alaska Roadless Rule DEIS because I am concerned with how the Rule and the proposed full exemption will impact my fishing, subsistence harvesting, foraging for wild foods, the peace and solitude I find in nature, recreating, the status of the Tongass as a national and global treasure, the forest's ability to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change impacts, and especially conservation of resources for future generations .

Out of the alternatives described in the AKRR DEIS I support alternative 1: no action. The rule is working fine as it is by balancing the conservation of our fish and wildlife habitat with important development projects. We depend on roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest for our economic livelihood, healthy fish habitat, foraging and gathering wild foods, recreating and enjoying nature, carbon sequestration and local climate change mitigation, viewing wildlife, keeping public lands wild for future generations, and fiscal responsibility in saving taxpayer dollars not building roads below cost. A full exemption does not protect these values, nor does it effectively balance economic development and conservation of roadless area characteristics. A full exemption from the Roadless Rule and increased logging and roadbuilding will negatively impact the Tongass and what I and many others use and depend on the forest to provide for us.

The Roadless areas on the Tongass that are especially important to me are those on or around Baranof Island, Chichagof Island, Admiralty Island, the northern mainland above Port Snettisham (around Juneau), and in fact all of the inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass. I want the roadless areas in these locations to stay in roadless status in any alternative selected by the Forest Service, and to be managed to provide for the uses and activities I listed above. It is important to me that the T77 and the TNC conservation priority areas also retain their roadless protections.

I do not support the Forest Services preferred alternative of a full exemption. A full exemption is not in the interests of Southeast Alaskans who live in and use the Tongass National Forest, because, as it happens, the majority of Alaskans (and outsiders) DO in fact support the current management plan. Increased roading and logging, at any level, is simply a boondoggle: it will cost taxpayers millions of dollars wasted in road building, logs and wood will be sold at a loss for export markets, huge corporations will benefit more than the tens of thousands of local people whose livelihoods it will harm. Finally, we believe that the process itself is an illegal and short sighted resource grab at the expense of all of Native tribes and villages, other local stewards of the resources, as well as the international community. We just say "NO!"

The State of Alaska says that a full exemption is needed for rural economic development opportunities. However, a full exemption would not help create more rural economic development opportunities, it would instead harm our existing rural economies that are based on the visitor industry and commercial fishing industry.

It would further harm rural economic opportunities because pursuing the same outdated economic model of old growth clearcut harvesting for export stifles innovation and possibility in other sectors, such as mariculture, sustainable young growth harvest, and rural agriculture. If the Forest Service wants to support rural economic development, they should devote resources to develop and support our fishing and visitor industries, help us transition to second growth logging, invest in creating and maintaining recreation infrastructure, improve and streamline existing permitting processes for important community projects, rather than rehashing old conflicts.

I urge the Forest Service to prioritize the voices of Southeast Alaskans over those of our political representation and corporate interests. Choosing a full exemption will not create a long lasting, durable solution for roadless areas on the Tongass. It will only increase the legal challenges, uncertainty for businesses, and conflict on the Tongass going forward.

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