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Organization:
Title:
Comments: My name is Riley Whitson and I live in Sitka, Alaska. I was born in Sitka, Alaska to a commercial fishing family. My life has revolved around the natural resources found in this unique place for food, employment, and recreation for my entire life. There are very few places in this world that offer a consistent source for all three of those. There is no way to place a value on one's homeplace. 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 subsistence harvesting, hunting, fishing, the peace and solitude I find in nature, recreating, practicing my culture, the status of the Tongass as a national and global treasure, the conservation of resources for future generations .

Out of the alternatives described in the AKRR DEIS I support alternative 3: open up roaded roadless and build logical extensions. It is a workable compromise that allows for economic development and the protection of roadless characteristics. I depend on roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest for economic livelihood, healthy fish habitat, deer habitat and subsistence hunting, practicing my culture, recreating and enjoying nature, viewing wildlife, keeping public lands wild for future generations, fiscal responsibility and saving taxpayer dollars . 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), the central mainland from Hobart Bay to Stikine River, the southern mainland from Bradfield Canal to Dixon Entrance Kupreanof Island. I want the roadless areas in these locations to stay in roadless status in any alternative selected by the Forest Service, and 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 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 The amount of irresponsible actions that a complete exemption would allow on the Tongass is astronomical. I believe the only way to responsibly develop a wild area is to take gradual steps in that direction in order to realize the proper balance of nature and development for the growing resource that is humanity. If we allow a complete lapse in oversight in development things will not go well. I know that no matter what choice is made by the government they will attempt to control the development in a way that makes sense to them, but it is likely that a full exemption would give opportunities to those who would willingly take advantage of natural resources to do so. I hope there is a compromise that can be reached.. 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 support our fishing and visitor industries invest in creating and maintaining recreation infrastructure.

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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