

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/21/2019 8:00:00 AM

First name: Rose

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: America Needs 'Roadless Rule' Protections for Tongass & Chugach National Forests Now More Than Ever

Dear U.S. Forest Service,

As a biologist, avid outdoorsperson, and parent of a family that vacations annually in Alaska, I strongly oppose the Forest Service's plan to eliminate "Roadless Rule" protections for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. I urge you to select the "no action" alternative to protect and preserve these life-saving landscapes.

As you know the Tongass is America's wildest remaining national forest, with more than 9 million acres of roadless areas. And it's home to a wide range of wildlife, including Alexander Archipelago wolves, grizzly bears and salmon. It also stores a vast amount of carbon, with its centuries-old trees serving as a carbon-sink life raft in this perilous time of a rapidly accelerating Climate Crisis. Logging releases most of that carbon into the atmosphere, where CO2 concentrations are already well above those considered safe by 97% of the world's scientists.

American national forests (and pristine wildlands) provide clean water, fresh air and a lifetime of memories of hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, and wildlife and bird watching to over 200,000,000 people annually (including my own family) and support an outdoor recreation economy worth some \$700 billion. But as I'm sure you are well aware, development, like roads divides areas of relatively continuous habitat into smaller, disconnected parcels causing habitat fragmentation which alters the behavior of wildlife and thus the viability of the ecosystems which all life on our planet depends on.

Safeguarding the water, recreation, fish, wildlife and jobs that depend on our national forests and wildlands requires that government not only consider but also apply the best available science to its planning and management of these natural treasures.

Your proposal to open the door to clearcutting and bulldozing is irresponsible and fundamentally threatens my natural heritage as well as my childrens' future. The Tongass & Chugach belong to all Americans and shouldn't be sacrificed to the timber industry, which provides a small fraction of the jobs and income in Southeast Alaska compared to tourism and fishing - both of which rely on intact forests to thrive. It's even more important to save these last remaining roadless forests because your agency has fragmented and logged so much of our national forests, devastating wildlife, clean waters, and our shared climate along the way.

I likewise oppose your plan to allow the agency to open any of the 5 million acres of roadless areas in the Chugach National Forest to bulldozing and clearcutting for logging. This move is blatantly a backdoor repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule, which protects all roadless lands because of the critical role they play in protecting pure water, and in securing wildlife habitat and remote recreation.

Please -think of the considerable ecological benefits intact old-growth forests provide our society and think of our future generations by selecting the "no action" alternative to maintain "Roadless Rule" protections for both the Tongass and Chugach.

Sincerely,

Rose Ann Witt

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