

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/1/2019 8:00:00 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: America's largest national forest is a treasure

I'm distraught to learn that the administration is promoting sweeping changes to the Alaska-specific Roadless Rule that would effectively destroy the wilderness of the Tongass National Forest by completely removing the Tongass from roadless protections. I urge you to select the "No Action" alternative on the Alaska-specific Roadless Rule instead.

The Tongass National Forest is one of the last intact temperate rainforests on Earth, with pristine old growth forests in its roadless lands. The pristine nature of the environment provides habitat for a stunningly diverse array of wildlife including salmon, wolves, bear, deer, and birds of prey such as the Northern Goshawk. The Tongass is America's only remaining vast, wild national forest. It plays a vital role in absorbing greenhouse gas emissions, storing approximately 8 percent of the total carbon of all the national forests of the lower 48 states combined. It also contains sacred sites of great importance to Native people of Alaska.

The proposed rule opens an additional 165,000 acres to logging and strips Roadless Rule protections from all 9.2 million acres of inventoried roadless areas in the Tongass. It does so with little to no justification or documented support. The rule will fragment the forest and harm wildlife that rely on old-growth habitat. For example, the rule will allow new roads and logging that threaten important wild salmon populations.

The proposed rule's claim that exempting the entire Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule will have only minimal environmental effect is simply not justified by the record, and an overwhelming majority of public and stakeholder input favored either maintaining roadless areas or making small modifications. The course chosen by the administration ignores the public, fails to find balance, and threatens the crown jewel of the National Forest System.

I strongly urge the Forest Service to select Alternative 1, the "no-action" alternative.

Thank you,

Beth Dillenbeck