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Comments: The Forest Service needs to choose Alternative 1 from its DEIS since this would keep the Roadless Rule fully intact in the Tongass National Forest.

Some of the old growth forest areas of spruce, hemlock and cedar in the TNF include giant trees (over 200 feet) that are over 800 years old. Unfortunately half of the old growth forest area in the TNF has already been logged. Half of the remaining old growth area (around 165,000 acres) is protected under the Roadless Rule. It is important to maintain roadless area protection of the old growth forests for their incredibly rich biodiversity, superior ability to absorb carbon and naturally greater resistance to wildfires (they are cooler and damper than other parts of the forest).

The TNF contains many islands, much water, dramatic fiords, tall mountains, rocks, glaciers, bogs, bears, wolves (some rare), mountain goats, deer, the endangered Marbled Murrelet, an endangered subspecies of Northern Goshawk, the largest Bald Eagle population in the world, over 100 rare plant species and many marine animals. All 5 Pacific salmon species spawn and thrive in the TNF as do many trout species. Protecting the many streams in the TNF is important for protecting the drinking water of Juneau, Sitka and other towns in the TNF.

The TNF accounts for 80% of the Panhandle or Southeast Alaska Region and is responsible for a large share of that regions employment. This region has a population of 73,000, almost a tenth of the states population. In 2017 the tourism sector in the SE Alaska region employed 7,739 and was growing rapidly; the seafood industry employed 3,829, the mining industry 886 and the timber industry only 302.

Alaskan politicians have long pushed for opening the Tongass roadless areas to more logging claiming that it is necessary for job creation and economic growth. But there are much better ways to create jobs in this region. There is a backlog of salmon habitat restoration projects from previous periods of clearcutting as well as a backlog of general forest maintenance. Addressing permitting issues for the tourism and recreation sectors would also enable these sectors to grow faster.

The Tongass National Forest (TNF) is the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. This forest is home to large and varied populations of wildlife and because of its cool wet forest floor stores more carbon per acre than any other forest on earth! At a time when we are threatened by global warming and the extinction of many species this is the last forest that should be made exempt from the Roadless Rule.

The Roadless Rule was adopted by the Forest Service in 2001 to protect our wild areas from development. It banned logging, road building and mineral extraction in the Inventoried Roadless Areas of national forests. It prevents habitat fragmentation and slows down global warming. Exempting the Tongass from this Roadless Rule protection is poor policy.

The proposed exemption would subsidize the lumber industry at the expense of the fisheries and tourism industries in Southeast Alaska. This is unjust and a money losing proposition. The tourism industry has been growing rapidly and is by far the most important industry in Southeast Alaska. It is flourishing because of the majestic fiords, mountains, glaciers, islands, tall trees and abundant wildlife that make up the Tongass.

In 2018 Glacier Bay (located near Juneau in the Tongass) was rated the best cruise ship destination in the world. The natural beauty and pristine environment of the TNF is what draws tourists to Southeast Alaska. Clearcutting does not attract tour boats. Maintaining the ban on logging in the roadless areas in the Tongass will allow the tourism industry to continue to flourish.

The fishing industry in Southeast Alaska that employs more than 12 times as many people as the lumber industry would also be damaged by the proposed Roadless Rule exemption. The cold, clean stream water that nourishes the salmon and trout in the TNF would be threatened with greater warming and sediment from logging.

According to Trout Unlimited the Tongass produces more salmon than all other national forests combined! The current Roadless Rule protection for the Tongass is needed to protect salmon. Improved forest maintenance and stream restoration rather than logging are better ways of improving the local economy.

Granting exemption to the Roadless Rule for the Tongass would open the door for other western states to seek exemptions.

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