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Comments: 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.

A substantial majority of people in both national and local polls support keeping the Roadless Rule in the Tongass as do local indigenous groups. Over 2 million tourists visited Alaska in 2018, 2/3 of them visited the Tongass area.

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

The Forest Service should be researching ways to reimburse Alaska for protecting its forests through carbon credits not supporting more logging in old growth forests and wild roadless areas.

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.