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Organization:

Title:

Comments: HC275

Formal Comment Submitted November 12, 2019 by:

Terre Thomas

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To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to The Forest Service and the USDA from Exempting the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule enacted in 2001.

Not only would carving roads and clear cutting some of the last remaining old growth trees in the United States wreak havoc on wildlife habitat and indigenous communities, it would also go a long way toward ruining a growing economy built on supporting fisheries, recreational opportunities and tourism. These are the types of sustainable economic growth we should be encouraging. The days of resource plundering for a fast buck are over, as few people benefit, while many ways of life are destroyed, never to recover.

The Tongass is an irreplaceable National Treasure, the largest intact temperate rainforest in North America and possibly on earth. It provides about 8% of US carbon sequestration, a more valuable commodity than the would be timber extracion, especially in this time of global warming, when we need plants to temper our climate and provide oxygen for us to breathe.

Alaska has experienced unprecedented heat waves the last two summers. This proposal will surely make it worse.

State officials claim "it would boost the local economy", but at a great expense to the citizens who already work in the area. While only about 300 people (1%) now work in the timber industry, those employed in the \$1billion salmon fisheries and seafood industry make up 8%, and tourism provides another 17% employment. This claim does not even take into consideration the many indigenous tribes who depend on the forest for their subsistence from hunting, fishing and other resource use, plus their cultural survival.

Carving roads into the forest and clear cutting old growth and young growth trees will have an irreversibly negative effect on the environment. Once you have destroyed that ecosystem, it can never be fully restored. It would take thousands of years! Carving roads and exposing the ground will not only cause erosion, but will alter the surrounding climate. Alaska has experienced unprecedented heat waves the last two summers. This proposal will surely make it worse. The soil will was into waterways destroying salmon streams, and wildlife habitat will be fragmented. Those trees not only sequester carbon, (650 million tons or about 1/2 the US CO2 emmissions in 2017) but they trap sediment, regulate water and air temperatures, provide shelter and habitat, intercept moisture to temper climate, and don't forget the micorhizzia that connect all that vegetation to one another. Once the ecosystem is destroyed by timber harvesting, and other resource extraction, it can never be rebuilt or adequately replaced. Oh you can plant a "tree farm" but that just won't ever come close to doing the same job.

So what will anyone have gained by this exemption? Well the timber industry will have been given permission to

"steal" the Tongass National Forest trees from the American people. It is OUR National Forest, set aside by Theodore Roosevelt in 1907. I don't recall him giving it to the timber industry. The Chinese will most likely benefit most from the many millions of board feet of lumber sold to them. Oh, and it would allow for the sale of timber to make toilet paper too, just like the Canadians are doing with timber from their adjacent boreal forest. How unbelievably shortsighted can one get?

If changing the rules is allowed to happen here, who's to say it won't be allowed to happen in every national forest? Our heritage isn't for sale (or given away) to the extraction industries. It is meant to be preserved for posterity, our children "unto the seventh generation". Growing up, our family spent summers cruising, fishing and recreating in the north coast waterways. More recently we enjoyed a cruise through the inland passage, stopping in Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan, walking on a glacier, studying the flora and fauna, supporting the local shops and eateries. These are the employment opportunities of the future, not the quick resource grab that leaves their Alaskan homeland denuded, devastated and unable to ever recoup the losses to that environment.

Don't carve up, log away, and extract the future of southeast Alaska for some very short term economic gain for a few who don't care about what happens to the environment or the people living there. Don't permit the destruction of one of the most magnificent places in the United States. Don't destroy the symbiotic relationship of ALL the sentient inhabitants of that pristine ecosystem. This land is OUR land. It belongs to us, and future generations, including yours. The economic future of this and every place on earth really depends on sustainability. Any choice that does not support this effort, is another "nail in our coffin". Make what our children inherit from us better, not worse.

Respectfully submitted,

Terre Thomas

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