

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/8/2019 9:00:00 AM

First name: Thomas

Last name: Witherspoon

Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Thomas Witherspoon and I live in Sitka, AK. I have been in Southeast Alaska for 5 years. I depend on the forest for a supply of venison and seafood to feed my family a healthy diet and to offset the high cost of groceries in this region. I value the forest for the experiences myself and my family are able to gain by living and recreating here. Additionally, my career is with the USFS and I rely upon this forest for my employment! I am writing a comment on the Alaska Roadless Rule DEIS because I am concerned with how the Rule and the proposed full exemption will impact my fishing, hunting, subsistence harvesting, foraging for wild foods, the peace and solitude I find in nature, recreating, practicing my culture, the status of the Tongass as a national and global treasure, the forest's ability to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change impacts, the conservation of resources for future generations .

Out of the alternatives described in the AKRR DEIS I support alternative 1: no action. It shows the Forest Service is responding to the needs and voices of Southeast Alaskan communities. I depend on roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest for healthy fish habitat, deer habitat and subsistence hunting, foraging and gathering wild foods, recreating and enjoying nature, carbon sequestration and local climate change mitigation, viewing wildlife, keeping public lands wild for future generations, fiscal responsibility and saving taxpayer dollars practicing my culture. A full exemption does not protect these values, nor does it effectively balance economic development and conservation of roadless area characteristics. A full exemption from the Roadless Rule and increased logging and roadbuilding will negatively impact the Tongass and what I and many others use and depend on the forest to provide for us.

The Roadless areas on the Tongass that are especially important to me are those on or around all of the inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass Baranof Island. I want the roadless areas in these locations to stay in roadless status in any alternative selected by the Forest Service, and be managed to provide for the uses and activities I listed above. It is important to me that the T77 and the TNC conservation priority areas retain their roadless protections.

I do not support the Forest Services preferred alternative of a full exemption. A full exemption is not in the interests of Southeast Alaskans who live in and use the Tongass National Forest, because It dismisses the partnerships and collaboration that work to provide balanced alternatives. These alternatives provide compromises and in the absence of compromise, choosing full exemption appears very insincere to the collaborators, the public, and the mission of the agency.. The State of Alaska says that a full exemption is needed for rural economic development opportunities. However, a full exemption would not help create more rural economic development opportunities, it would instead harm our existing rural economies that are based on the visitor industry and commercial fishing industry.

It would further harm rural economic opportunities because pursuing the same outdated economic model of old growth clearcut harvesting for export stifles innovation and possibility in other sectors, such as mariculture, sustainable young growth harvest, and rural agriculture. If the Forest Service wants to support rural economic

development, they should transition to second growth logging invest in creating and maintaining recreation infrastructure devote resources to support our fishing and visitor industries improve and streamline existing permitting processes for important community projects rather than rehashing old conflicts.

I urge the Forest Service to prioritize the voices of Southeast Alaskans over those of our political representation and corporate interests. Choosing a full exemption will not create a long lasting, durable solution for roadless areas on the Tongass. It will only increase the legal challenges, uncertainty for businesses, and conflict on the Tongass going forward.

When future generations look back at this moment in history, they will be shocked to read about the lack of science driving major forest management decisions in the last contiguous temperate rainforest on the planet Earth. Politics and business do not have the ecosystem's best interest at heart, and regardless of the details pertaining to all the different alternatives...the voice of the taxpaying public should be considered seriously, every time.

[Position]