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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing as a plant ecologist and as a US citizen to express my strong objection to the preferred alternative in the current Alaska Roadless Rulemaking #54511. That is - I urge the US Forest Service to KEEP the full current Roadless Rule protections in place for all old-growth acres in the Tongass National Forest.

As a professional ecological scientist, I am familiar with many formal studies of the impacts of roads on forest environments and their biological diversity. Roads inevitably change microclimates, reducing plant, animal, and microbial diversity typical of old-growth forests. These effects are especially significant in wet forest types such as the temperate rainforest of the Tongass. Alaska's Tongass National Forest is the world's largest old-growth temperate rainforest, and it contains immense reserves of old carbon as well as high levels of diversity in plant and animal groups. Logging operations in old-growth areas, and even the seemingly small areal disturbance of creating access roads, will release very substantial amounts of carbon into the atmosphere - thereby exacerbating damaging climate change impacts. Moreover, road impacts on animal behavior and plant diversity are likely to reduce the conservation effectiveness of the Tongass.

As a scientist who has worked with several Native American tribes in the US Southwest, I am also sensitive to the fact that the Tongass old-growth forest is the cultural home and foundation of many Alaskan Native groups. Expanding the current area available for logging operations will damage cultural values and should not be pursued.

Finally - as someone who frequently spends money on eco-tourism travel, and frequently eats seafood from the Pacific Northwest, I fear the loss of significant economic activity if logging of old-growth in the Tongass is expanded. Old-growth protection fosters sustainable economic benefits in the region.

For all these reasons, I urge the Forest Service to keep full current Roadless Rule protections in place for the Tongass, and to deny any additions to areas not currently classified as suitable for logging -- particularly all old-growth acreage.

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