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Organization:

Title:

Comments: HC511

Dear Secretary Perdue and Senator Murkowski, [text bolded for emphasis]

I am currently on a boat cruise off the coast of South Baranof Wilderness, hosted by the Sitka Conservation Society (SCS). SCS hosts boat cruises in the summer to introduce people to the marvelous wonders of the Tongass with the help of experienced boat captains and knowledgeable naturalists. On this cruise into the South Baranof Wilderness, I have seen:

[drawing of a mussel] mussels, [drawing of a jellyfish] jellyfish, [drawing of a fish] fish [drawing of a marbled murrelet] marbled murrelet [drawing of a sea otter] sea otter [drawing of a gray whale] gray whales Bald eagles, Glaces gulls, cormorants

The Wilderness area is rich in biodiversity and supports an incredibly productive ecosystem. Salmon, steelhead trout, dolly varden are sustained by the vast freshwater stream systems that empty into fjords and inlets. Brown bears feast upon these salmon as they swim upstream, distributing their carcasses throughout the forest. These carcasses fertilize the soil and feed the Sitka Spruce and Mountain Hemlock trees that tower over the land. Underneath this old growth canopy, Sitka Black-tail deer browse on abundant berries and shrubs.

The South Baranof Wilderness is not the only place in Southeast Alaska with such incredible biodiversity. It is just one example of what the Tongass National Forest can produce when it is protected and left to its own natural processes. The flora and fauna that we find in the South Baranof Wilderness area also thrive in inventoried roadless areas throughout the Tongass. These roadless areas are numerous around Sitka and provide our community with important hunting, fishing, foraging, and recreating opportunities. We depend on these roadless areas for our sustenance and our livelihoods including our commercial fishing and tourism industries.

Outside of Wilderness areas like South Baranof, our way of life and the roadless areas we depend on are being threatened by politicians and special interests pushing for short term profits that have long term ecological and economic consequences. Wilderness areas, roadless area, and the intact habitat they support are an investment in the long term sustainability of our region. Please keep the national Roadless Rule on the Tongass!

Save this precious wilderness for future generations to love.

Sincerely,

Laurie Litman and Lennon Bustamante

[Position]