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Organization:

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COMMENT ON ALASKA ROADLESS RULE

I write in support of maintaining the Roadless Rule for the Tongass National Forest. I want the greatest protection possible for the forest.

I attended the November 4, 2019 public meeting in Juneau with presentations by Forest Service personnel about the proposed lifting of forest protections. I oppose removing Alaska and our forest from the national Roadless Rule. Below are some of my reasons.

As a fifty year resident of Alaska, I have witnessed the massive clearcutting in the 1980s of the Tongass National Forest and private forest lands. It devastated the habitat for bears, deer, other wildlife and fish. Buffer zones did not provide the safe space necessary for eagles' nests or stream protection; thin strips too easily blow down. We cannot repeat that scale or type of logging. In counterpoint to old growth harvesting, young growth cutting has been proposed. I do not support young growth cutting because the process disturbs the ground more than we can afford to sacrifice to attain board-feet goals.

There is much less need for Tongass logging than 40 years ago. We no longer need to prop up two pulp mills. Alternatives exist for wood products: southeast United States' pine crops provide fast growing trees which can be quickly and easily harvested.

Local Alaska communities have changed their economies to benefit from forest retention versus forest reduction. Tourism and fishing need protected forests. Birds and waterfowl need a protected forest. Mammals need a protected forest. People need a protected forest. Access to bear watching streams can be managed without roads while maintaining protection for the forest. Clean drinking water needs a protected forest. Renewable energy needs a protected roadless forest.

A healthy forest is more valuable than ever now that Alaska is experiencing significant warming due to climate change. We need an intact Tongass for clean air, cool streams, and safe human and animal habitat. Spruce trees are visibly thinning due to drought, needle-drop, and potential diseases, yet they still offer the greatest cooling effect in summer. Sawfly infestations have impacted hemlock stands. Wildland fires now threaten the

temperate rainforest. I never thought our cool damp climate could be subject to fire; now I fear it.

I am a retired Forest Service employee. During my 14 years' service, I spoke to thousands of visitors about life in Southeast Alaska. Their joy was seeing glaciers and wild salmon and animals in their natural surroundings. People learned the value of an intact forest. We also explained how humans can use but not abuse the land and water. Guests who had lost their home forests were eager to experience a landscape closer to the way it was created.

As a FS staff person for many years, one of my tasks was surveying forest users every five years as part of the National Visitor Use Monitoring surveys. We asked trail users a series of questions that had been prepared nationally. One question that always brought laughter was this: "Did you come to this area to avoid the heat?" No longer does this question cause humor. It is very serious because for the first time this summer I sought trails deep in the forest to avoid the heat. My home in Juneau is surrounded by large spruce and hemlock trees; it is cooler in summer because of trees. The forest moderates our climate. I would like to see how visitors respond this year to the heat survey question. The NVUM year began October, 2019.

I have three important points regarding the public meeting I attended in November. First, I strongly disagree with the "Environmental Analysis Overview." It grossly underestimates the effects of eliminating roadless rule protection for the forest. Second, Forest Service personnel used up valuable time making an agency presentation. That was inconsiderate of the 300-plus citizens attending in the Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall. Third, citizen questions and testimony were not recorded by agency staff. This was a rude disregard of public interest. For future meetings, facilitate discussions more openly and engage the public, not out of fear that we might make staff uncomfortable, but that you honor residents whose lives you will affect.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in defense of the forest that supports me.

Laurie Ferguson Craig

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