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Organization:

Title:

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To The United States Department of Agriculture:

This letter is a response to proposed "36 CFR Part 294, Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation; National Forest System Lands in Alaska."

I do not believe that the USDA proposed solution works for the Tongass National Forest. I urge you to adopt Alternative 1, continuing the roadless rule.

I feel qualified to speak about this topic. I moved to Hoonah in Southeast Alaska in 1979, moved to Sitka in 1995. That means I've lived in Southeast Alaska for 40 years. I am writing this as an individual who loves Southeast Alaska forests and water, not as any part of an environmental or business organization. No one urged me to write this.

Road building backhoes lumbered off the barges to build roads to log thousands of acres around Hoonah in 1982, and built hundreds of miles of road. The very first backhoe also dug the foundation for our first house that my wife and I built with our 4 hands in 1982.

I'm a political moderate. I saw the jobs and pride that came from logging in Hoonah. But then, as a cyclical industry, it died. The jobs died with it. Now there's been a resurgence in the economy and jobs. Guess where the jobs are now? Yes, tourism: showing off the pure mountain forests and culture of Hoonah - with thousands of tourists stopping in Hoonah to spend their money - and once again offering local people jobs. Contrary to logging or mining, this industry will stay. And I repeat, the travel and tourism industry is based upon the fact that the Tongass and the ocean surrounding the Tongass is pristine and unique.

My family moved to Sitka about 18 months after the pulp mill shut down. It was bleak. People moving away, losing great jobs. But things changed over a surprisingly short time. Charter fishing increased dramatically. Ecotourism, with small ships from "National Geographic" and "The Boat Company" began running out of Sitka. More and more people on large cruise ships wanted to come to Sitka and the Tongass. Sure, a few came for the jewelry stores. But the great percentage of people came to Sitka and Alaska to experience what doesn't exist other places in the U.S.: the wilderness, incomparable natural beauty, sightings of dolphins and whales and

eagles, observing the mystery of salmon migrating up cold clear streams, the lack of people.

I also view myself as a modern day "wilderness explorer." I look for places without human footprints or survey tape marking the passages through the forest. I look for signs of virgin timber and ecological areas unmarked by the passage of man. I wander through them. I still find them. Not many, but some.

I don't know the experiences of you who are reading this. I don't know if you've spent time out of doors in places that are so untouched that you get lost in just being alive, rubbing shoulders with spruce trees so huge and straight that there's no reference - nothing to tell you just how big they are. Until, around on the other side, there's an opening ripped the size of a bear in the roots and base of the tree, and a huge one at that - big enough to walk into if I was brave enough - a bear's den. I do a slow threesixty, just to make sure. Fighting through Devil's Club, with leaves larger than a Thanksgiving turkey platter. Remembering the hike all week, as the stickers work their way out of my hands.

I'm a commercial fisherman. Fortunately, times have changed. I remember throwing our paper plates out the window of our troller in 1980. In our minds, one action didn't impact another. Now we know that it does. I'm embarrassed by that. Wild salmon depend on clean water and wild country. One action does impact our environment. Please do not impact wild salmon and our wild environment by building more roads.

Various sources cite approximately fifty percent of the Tongass has already been logged. That's enough.

The Tongass Management Plan was a challenge. Stakeholders engaged, and to their credit, a Plan emerged as a compromise. A compromise that's working, a compromise that in the end - stakeholders were proud of. Now, the logging industry, two Senators, a president, and a governor want to build roads. That's sad.

With the status quo, of no road building, it allows great fishing, great tourism, and transition to secondary growth logging. Building any roads in the Tongass is a bad idea and a bad plan.

Sincerely,

William Hutton

[POSITION]