

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/15/2019 9:00:00 AM

First name: Luke

Last name: Johnson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: First, in a single sentence I'll say that I think Alaska should be exempted from the Roadless Rule. I recall distinctly when it went into effect in 2001, at the time I was living in the Black Hills National Forrest. The concept of a blanket rule that froze the status of nearly all new access to the public's National Forest at an arbitrary point in time seemed short sighted then, as it still does today. Many (especially non-Alaskan) supporters of the Rule champion how 'unique and different' Alaska is, and they likely don't realize that sentiment is a precisely argument for exemption from the nationwide Roadless Rule.

I currently live in the Tongass National Forrest, and have been fortunate to travel around a good part of the area, including Sitka, Pelican, Hoonah, Kake, Angoon, Juneau, Haines, Wrangell, Klawock, Craig, etc; I would like to think I have some concept of what the Tongass intrinsically is composed of. Of course that travel has always been by plane or boat, and rarely short trips out side of communities where the very few remaining USFS roads still exist. Prince of Wales is a nice exception where you can drive across the island on what were indeed roads pioneered by the timber industry. Likewise, in my own boat I have seen areas that those who aren't so fortunate have zero access to: Rodman Bay, Hoonah Sound, Redoubt, Kruzof Island, and many more areas within the range of my small boat in the Sitka area.

Again, I often contrast my former home with my current. The Black Hills NF district literally advertises and promotes the existing USFS maintained road system (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/blackhills/recreation/ohv>); they have 3600 miles of roads/trails within a the 1.2 million acre forest. Here in the Tongass the trend has been to shun, abandon and vilify any roads. We have around 2100 miles of road in the 16 million acre forest (https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/home/library/pdfs/habitat/00_07.pdf) . To turn that into a comparison, the Black Hills NF has 22 times the road density of the Tongass NF! And of course, with the Roadless Rule, the vast majority of the Tongass NF will remain unused, unappreciated, and inaccessible by the public.

I would like to quote directly from a USFS website (https://www.fs.fed.us/eng/road_mgt/qanda.shtml): "What is the purpose of the Forest Service Road System? Although the majority of forest roads were constructed to facilitate timber harvesting, today the Forest Service Road System constitutes an important component of the Nation's rural road system. It provides access for resource protection and for commercial activities or public uses such as timber harvesting, recreation outfitting, mining, and grazing. In addition, the system provides access for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, skiing, bird watching, camping, hiking, and driving for pleasure." It seems clear the USFS understands how the small fraction of the public that actually get out and into our National Forests use the existing roads; it is a pity that so many rail against this access who have likely live nowhere near Alaska, or the Tongass NF.

This is debate is not about 'timber and mining' as so many mistakenly believe... This blanket rule has already, and will continue to inhibit public and individual use of the forest. I personally would love to see the USFS provide the public with the benefit of roads. I would like to see citizens living in the Tongass without boats or aircraft be able to venture further into the forest with vehicles or ATVs. I would like to see new roads allowing the public to

explore interesting places, such as lakes, waterfalls, hot springs, mountain passes, and when possible transit between communities in an efficient manner.

In a recent local news article, one of the members of our State Advisory committee made a comment (<https://www.kcaw.org/2018/11/06/sitkans-tell-ak-roadless-rule-committee-that-best-action-is-no-action/>) "Eliminating the Roadless Rule will not bring back the logging industry", clearly espousing the politically easy 'no action' option and the near sightedness that only one user group is interested in USFS roads. I disagree completely. In my hometowns scoping letter, (https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/109834_FSPLT3_5116142.pdf) our city provided an excellent non-timber need for roads: we need access to reach environmentally friendly hydroelectric power sources.

Remove or modify the Roadless Rule from Alaska and see what uses the Public and the USFS might actually find for new roads within our forest! I don't think it will be timber either, but I'm hoping it will be recreation! Eliminating the Roadless Rule is not a mandate to build roads, it is simply the opportunity to serve the public; opportunity is a good thing.

Thanks for your consideration.

[Position]

[Position]