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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Our comment

Dear Forest Service:

Please consider this message as our comment on the proposed rule and draft EIS concerning the Roadless Area Conservation Rule with respect to the Tongass National Forest. I participated in the Forest Service public meeting in Washington DC on Nov. 14, and I appreciate the detailed presentation by Forest Service officials.

I first visited the Tongass in 1968 during my military service in the U.S. Air Force, when my unit was on assignment in Juneau and Ketchikan. I have never forgotten the wild character of the Tongass, which surely exceeds that of any other national forest. The values of the Tongass for fish and wildlife should be managed to avoid any further damage.

We prefer the no-action alternative as described in the DEIS, meaning the forest would continue to be managed under the 2001 Roadless Rule and the 2016 Land and Resource Management Plan. The other five alternatives would lead to the loss of important national values of the Tongass, including superior fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness values, and the economic values of tourism and fisheries.

We are strongly against the proposed action, which would completely exempt the Tongass from the 2001 Roadless Rule. That goes even farther than the state-specific roadless rules adopted for Colorado and Idaho. We urge the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture to abandon the thought of any rule that would take the Tongass out of the protections written in the 2001 Roadless Rule. We know the State of Alaska wants to log more of the old growth forests and they want to build more roads. Please reject their request. The result would be to lose national values of the Tongass that can't be replaced.

Stronger protection is needed, not less protection as envisioned in the proposed rule. We prefer the provisions of the 2016 Land and Resource Management Plan, which the Forest Service wrote after considering suggestions and comments from diverse stakeholders in Alaska and elsewhere. That plan provides protection for the best salmon-bearing watersheds, with no logging or road building. The top priority for these watersheds should be to provide unimpaired habitat for terrestrial wildlife, wild salmon populations, and the ecosystems that support them.

We want the Forest Service to stop clearcutting old growth wherever it is damaging wildlife habitat. The 2016 plan takes steps toward that goal. Fifty years ago, those clearcuts were sanctioned partly because the damage against fish and wildlife habitat was not fully understood. Now we know better, and it is time to stop that kind of logging.

With respect to the economy of southeast Alaska, the 2016 plan aims to build sustainable industries that will provide jobs 50 to 100 years out. Ecotourism, fishing, hunting, and sustainable mariculture should be part of this picture. The clearcut logging was never a long-term solution, because the forest does not regenerate here as it does in Oregon (where I grew up) or Washington. Please continue to look toward industries that will turn to advantage the great ecological values of the wild Tongass. Exempting the Tongass from the Roadless Rule would be a step backwards, away from the progress made in the 2016 plan.

Thank you for considering our thoughts. Please keep us informed of further action on this project.

Sincerely,

George and Frances Alderson

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