

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/16/2019 9:00:00 AM

First name: Shawn

Last name: Blohm

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I oppose the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Forest Service's proposal to exempt the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule. I have reviewed the six alternatives identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act for this proposal and Alternative 1, which takes no action and would leave all of Alaska under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including the Tongass National Forest, is the only acceptable alternative.

This is because inventoried roadless areas provide large, relatively undisturbed blocks of important habitat for a variety of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and plants, contribute to healthy watersheds and clean drinking water and provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. The 2001 Roadless Rule also helps to protect social and ecological characteristics of inventoried areas from road construction and other detrimental activities. There are plenty of roads in Tongass National Forest and new roads are unnecessary. It would be irresponsible to allow more roads to be constructed.

I understand that the Tongass National Forest provides a lot of jobs directly related to tourism and outdoor recreation and is a major component of the local economy in southeast Alaska. 2.3 million people from around the world visit the Tongass National Forest each year. I am an avid bird watcher and love being outdoors. Visiting southeast Alaska and the Tongass National Park is on my bucket list of places to visit for bird and wildlife watching. I am counting on the National Forest Service to do the right thing and to maintain the 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule in the Tongass National Forest. This is important so that I can enjoy the ecologically rich landscape and critical wildlife habitat when I visit the Tongass National Forest in the near future. It would be very sad and disappointing if all I saw was cleared forest lands with no birds and wildlife. Then I would have absolutely no reason to remain or visit Alaska. I would have to go spend my money elsewhere and the local communities that depend on my tourist dollars would suffer.

The National Forest Service should focus on developing Ecotourism in all of our National Forest, including the Tongass National Forest, rather than timber harvesting our old growth forest to sell as wood overseas. Once the trees are gone, they're gone. They take a long time to grow back. It would make more economic and environmental sense to keep the Tongass National Forest a lush, green, bird and animal filled forest. If the old growth forest is kept intact it will keep the tourist and outdoor recreationist coming back again and again.

According to the USDA Forest Service website, the Tongass National Park abounds with special places, from bear and eagle viewing areas to migratory bird stopover sites, glaciers and misty fjords. It is the home to many species of endangered flora and fauna. Many of these species are susceptible to habitat fragmentation. Exempting the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule will undoubtedly lead to habitat degradation vital to these species survival by allowing access to inventoried roadless areas.

Large intact temperate old growth forest, like the Tongass National Forest, is important to preserve because of their role in combating global warming and climate change. The Tongass National Forest is an important and vital natural carbon sink that currently holds 8 to 12 percent of all carbon stored in the National Forest System. It is especially important not to allow tree clearing to occur in the Tongass National Forest. Trees in the forest have an important role to play in the carbon cycle by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and sequestering this gas into the plants and ground.

According to Alaska's Changing Environment: a new report on major observed climate changes found on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency's (NOAA) website states that Alaska is warming due to human caused global warming. The website also reports that temperatures in Alaska had smashed all time record highs in July 2019, with temperatures being 20 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit above average statewide. Anchorage had an all time high of 90 degrees Fahrenheit when temperatures should normally be in the mid-60s. Juneau saw high temperatures reach at least 70 degrees Fahrenheit for 17 consecutive days in 2019.

The NOAA website states that since 1950, Alaska has been warming twice as fast as the global average and that since 1990 record highs have occurred three times more often than record lows. This warming is causing important changes to the environment and climate such as changes in temperature, sea ice, glaciers, permafrost, plants, animals and oceans. This excess warmth contributed to forest fires and terrible air quality in Alaska. Timber harvesting in the Tongass National Forest will help to increase carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by eliminating the trees that absorb carbon dioxide. This would exacerbate the detrimental effects of climate change that Alaska, the United States and the world is experiencing and would eliminate its mitigating effect of combating climate change. It is imperative that the 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule remain intact in the Tongass National Forest. Even though I live in Ohio, I depend on the Tongass National Forest to combat and mitigate climate change for me too.

To reiterate, I vehemently oppose the USDA National Forest Service's proposal to exempt the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule. I have reviewed the six alternatives identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act for this proposal and Alternative 1, which takes no action and would leave all of Alaska under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including the Tongass National Forest, is the only acceptable alternative.

[Position]

[Position]