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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Along with the vast majority of my fellow citizens I am writing to express my result for the "No Action" alternative that would leave current Roadless protections in place. The no action alternative is the only option adequately considers the economic and cultural needs of Southeast Alaskans. It is also the only option that considers the ecology of our forest.

I am disheartened and disappointed that the public is forced to continuously fight this battle. This attempt to dismantle Roadless protections should have ended with the scoping comment period. The People stood united and with a clear voice stated that they demand that Roadless regulations remain. Unfortunately, the Forest Service has chosen to disregard its oath of public service and steamroll over the People, treating the Tongass as its own private tree farm. These actions are in direct contradiction to the Forest Service's own motto of "Caring for the Land and Serving People." Disregarding the democratic process and liquidating our few remaining intact forests is a shameful perversion of the original vision of the Forest Service.

As a lifelong Tongass resident, subsistence hunter, and commercial fisherman I want the forest to be protected for both myself, my community, and for future generations to come. It is unjust to deny our children the same privileges we have taken for granted for so long.

It has been proven that roads and clear-cuts have negative impacts on both deer and salmon, animals that I rely on for both my cash income and subsistence food supply. This is a clear-cut issue. We have seen it the heartbreaking results of abusing the land throughout most of the range of salmon, both in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

There is a reason that fishermen from the lower forty-eight undertake a long and expensive journey to and from Alaska each year, that reason is simply that there are no longer commercially viable populations of salmon in areas where the habitat has been and is being mismanaged. Salmon are incredible survivors, but they are not magical. Their spawning and rearing habitat needs must be met, or they can no longer reproduce, no matter how tenacious they are at reaching their spawning grounds. The Forest Service's preferred Alternative 6 disregards even the Agency's own literature that clearly states that both logging and road building have extreme negative impacts on salmon rearing habitat.

Already within the Tongass we can see the difference that industrial logging has made. With these recent hot and dry summers areas with large clear cuts such as the central and southern islands have greatly underperformed intact areas such as the northern outer coast which is more protected under the current management regime. The past several fishing summers I have seen vessels targeting Coho salmon flocking to the northern area of the forest, because wild runs in the more heavily impacted areas of the central and southern regions have failed to reproduce in adequate numbers to provide fishermen with a decent living.

The effects of habitat destruction will only become more pronounced as the climate warms. Rains will be more intense resulting in increased erosion and sedimentation. It only takes a few millimeters of sediment to smother salmon when they are in the egg or alevin stage of their life cycle. Droughts are also becoming more extreme. This summer we witnessed die-offs caused by low water and high temperatures. High temperatures cause salmon to die as a result of oxygen deprivation and from infections as a result of high bacteria loads and stress levels degrading the immune system. I have firsthand witnessed die-offs in streams. It is a disturbing to see thousands of fish suffocate from too warm water all at once.

The same negative outcome is true for deer populations as well. We don't have to speculate on the effects of clear-cuts. We can observe the effects of pillaging the forest on the islands of ADF&G unit 3 and 2 (the islands of the central and southern Tongass). For example, in the 1960s the Forest Service recorded Mitkof Island as one of the most productive deer areas of the Tongass. After the Agency clear-cut massive swaths of the old growth deer rely on for winter habitat the population plummeted. The deer season was closed outright for over a decade and now is open with a short season and a bag limit of one buck. One deer is not enough to feed one person let alone a family. Furthermore, because deer populations are so low it's difficult to even find your one buck. On Unit 2 deer bag limits have been reduced as the population of deer falls. As a result of the mismanagement of public lands the People have effectively had their subsistence rights stolen from them in direct contradiction to the Forest Service's legal obligations.

As deer populations are decimated subsistence hunters are forced to undertake dangerous sea journeys across exposed winter waters to put meat on their family's table. Cold, darkness, and foul weather are constant threats to those hunters forced to travel in winter. Additionally, those hunters most in need of subsistence are those too poor to own a boat. They are either out of luck or forced to undertake their trips in vessels not large enough to safely cross exposed water bodies. Forcing subsistence residents to undertake these risks is negligence on the behalf of an agency that is tasked to manage the people land for subsistence. Even as clear cutting is proved to be destructive to deer populations, the Forest Service is seeking to double down on a failed policy by removing the Roadless Rule against the demands of the Public.

Since it is currently a popular policy to try and put a price on everything, despite the simple fact that many of the most important things in life are unquantifiable, I calculate that reduction in hunting opportunities represents a loss of approximately 2500 dollars per family given the cost of buying meat to replace lost protein. The purchased meat is also proven to be less wholesome than wild game, leading to higher rates of illness in a region where access to medical treatment is difficult and extremely costly. Alaska is also an area with very poor food security, any disruption in the supply chain that carries food from Seattle to Alaskan villages would result in starvation if we were no longer able to subsist off the land. Maintaining subsistence resources as a food of last resort is a public safety necessity.

Economically, I am tired of subsidizing the liquidation of the very forest that provides me with my cash income and food supply. An average of 30 million dollars of taxpayer money has been thrown away subsidizing a small amount of jobs in the logging industry and the Forest Service's own timber program. This small but destructive industry is propped up to detriment of thousands of other jobs in the fishing and tourism industries that do not require subsidies. The only true winners from the Forest Service policy of pillaging the forest is the Alcan/Transpac group of timber exporters.

Given the massive and unjustified budget of the timber program on the Tongass I am forced to question the Forest Service's motives in pushing for repealing Roadless. The agency currently spends vastly more on its timber program than on wildlife, recreation, and wilderness management even though these programs are the primary source of revenue on the Tongass as well as the type of management the Public has been demanding. Is the Agency repealing Roadless against the wishes of the Public to justify outdated timber development jobs within the agency? From the behavior of the agency this seems a likely motivation. This is shameful behavior,

because national forests belong to the Public. Government agencies are legally responsible for both spending taxpayer money wisely and managing the public's land in a responsible and democratic way. The current timber management regime wantonly wastes taxpayer money and irreplaceable forests even as the Agency slashes funds for its recreation program. This reduction in funding has resulted in the closure of many public use cabins. This is absurd behavior, because the tourism on the Tongass generates a billion dollars per year and provides thousands of sustainable nonsubsidized jobs.

The continued effort to rollback Roadless is also both undemocratic and immoral. The word democracy comes from the two ancient Greek words demos, which means the People and kratia, which means rule. The People have spoken, and we demand that our forest not be thrown away. If the Forest Service were living up to its democratic responsibilities, there is no way that this process should have moved past the initial scoping period. Yet, we appear to be overruled by the will of a few unelected officials. When an agency can discard the will of the people, we no longer have a democracy. We have a tyranny.

Removing Roadless is immoral in face of a warming and ever more extreme climate. Tongass old-growth stores 8 percent of North America's carbon directly and nurtures an aquatic web of life that we do not fully understand, but that also sequesters vast amounts of carbon. As the previous absurdly hot and dry summer has just proved our land needs to have an intact ecology functioning at its full potential in order to continue to nurture us. We saw the results of a stressed ecosystem in the form of salmon that died from heat stress in the streams, runs that didn't materialize, and fishermen scouring the coast to find patches of salmon.

As a fisherman I see the changes happening rapidly in the ocean. Changes in the species composition in forage fish, changes in the size and behavior of salmon, changes in the overall fecundity of the Ocean. This summer I saw fellow fishermen traveling for days, leaving historically productive grounds and traveling north along the coast to try and leave the warmer water that was preventing fish from reaching their spawning grounds. All available evidence indicates that these stresses will get ever more extreme as climate change and ocean acidification worsen. Given this knowledge it is imperative that we do not add additional stresses to our already sick ecosystem.

Climate change will irrefutably result in the deaths of many people and degradation to the quality of life of those who survive, if indeed anyone survives at all. We must prepare for climate change by guarding our resources ever more carefully. Whether or not humanity survives this catastrophe depends largely on how respond now. Throwing away our forests and fisheries will guarantee that residents of the Tongass will not survive economically or culturally. We must turn away from a mindset of thoughtless extraction and plan for a sustainable economy that will work for us and our children. While we will always need timber products, we need to harvest trees in a way that is socially, ecologically, and sustainable for generations. More clear cutting and shipping round logs overseas does not full fill any of the above requirements.

I also see another moral reason why Roadless should remain in place. All ecosystems have an intrinsic right to exist a meaningful way in the in most of their original geographic area. A postage stamp preserved here and there is not a meaningful existence. Natural habitat must be allowed to fulfill its ecological functions. This incredible landscape and its connected seascape took millions of years to evolve, yet the Forest Service seems determined to dismantle all those eons of evolution in a single generation. It is criminal to tear up our home and treat as a onetime use commodity to be shipped to Asia at a benefit to a small group of elites and the detriment of everyone else.

To the people who crafted Alternative 6 the Tongass is clearly nothing more than numbers on a balance sheet. Money to be extracted and dished out to a few elites in the minimal amount of time possible in order to reward corporate shareholders with the biggest checks, even if selling 1,000-year-old trees for the price of a big mac costs the Public 30 million dollars a year. To those of us who live here it's our home, our pantry, and our church. I was born on this forest, my body is made up of the atoms of deer and fish my family harvested from the forest,

and when I die my bones will be buried in the forest.

To the Public that does not live in the forest, but still jointly own the land, the Tongass represents North America's last chance to get things right. As nearly half the Tongass has already been roaded and nearly all the richest stands have been logged off and turned to pulp, when we will have sacrificed enough on the altar of extraction? Will you allow our children to take up our culture and experience the blessings we have been provided with, or will we slam the door in their faces and say their futures are worthless?

Thank you for taking the time to review my comments. I hope that more consideration will be given to this round of comments than was given to the comments during the scoping period.

[POSITION]