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Organization: Community of Elfin Cove

Title:

Comments: It can be no surprise that there are differing ideas and efforts in our great nation to continue to be great. In Alaska our greatness is in our land, resources, and we the people.

When considering our land and resources, we the people we must consider not just monetary value of what can be dug, pumped or cut down but what else the people value of the land and resources.

The overwhelming and near universal opinions expressed to the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service on the proposed changes to management of the Tongass National Forest are to support maintaining the forest by adopting Alternative 1. This support is based on a deep understanding of the true value of an intact forest to the people who live in the forest, work in the forest, and depend on the forest for livelihoods, food, recreation and, spiritual growth. Some of this value is measurable and some immeasurable.

We can measure that the intact forest supports salmon and 1 in 10 jobs in Southeast Alaska are supported by salmon through commercial and guided sport fishing, and the many businesses that serve these industries. Ninety percent of rural households would go much hungrier without a healthy wild salmon population which depends on the many anadromous streams and lakes and ponds in the natural and undegraded watersheds of the forest. We can measure the value of the intact forest by the health of the 50 species of wildlife the feed on salmon as they return to the forest to spawn and die. It can be readily seen this year that a lack of returning salmon in the streams has caused bears to be out and about in mid-December and foraging in urban areas for enough fat to begin hibernation.

We know there are many watersheds in the Tongass still not restored from the last rounds of road building and clearcutting. There are in the Tongass 1,100 old roads crossing streams blocking 250 miles of important salmon spawning streams that the Forest Service has still not cleared to support salmon in the forest. In this time of changing ocean conditions and uncertain salmon returns we the people don't want to add insult to injury by further decimating habitat for those fish who manage to survive a warming sea, changing forage conditions, and this recent unprecedented drought in Alaska.

Our smaller rural villages are having a tough enough time remaining viable without taking the chance that building roads for the wholesale harvest of a trees for one more boom payday won't damage the salmon resource that could remain sustainable for generations to come. My 50 years in Elfin Cove have instilled in me a knowledge that we are sustained by salmon. My troller husband has depended on the health of the salmon runs and has given up a lot of fish and fishing time to try to mitigate the King salmon habitat destruction of other states and even of another country. This loss to my village is measurable as the number of resident trollers continues to decline. My children now depend on salmon and choosing to further degrade our habitat by road building and following what we now know about habitat destructive activities is to deprive my grandchildren of the opportunity to be sustained by salmon.

The last round of logging to feed pulp mills and round log exports developed small remote camps with loggers and their families who had to be provided State services like schools. As soon as the last clearcut was accomplished, those camps were closed and those loggers with their families and their paychecks left this state for their homes elsewhere. This is measurable too.

The less measurable loss to the people who reside in the Tongass as well as the people of the United States who own the Tongass is value of wildness. Once roaded and cut there will not be in the foreseeable future such an intact place of wildness as exists now in this forest. I do not think it is the privilege of this generation to reap a short-term economic benefit and cause a loss of such a complex ecosystem.

All of this is not to ignore all we're learning about trees and plants and their great connectedness and how an old growth tree is mother and grandmother and great grandmother necessary to the survival of the whole of the forest. We need a greater understanding of how the parts affect the whole before clearcutting our way for a temporary paycheck to a few.

I suggest that any logging be confined to already roaded areas and second growth trees. That would be sustainable and a responsible response to the need for reasonable economic activity based on cutting trees in this forest.

I highly support Alternative 1, no action, for the integrity of the Tongass for the health of the people and all the plants and animals who dwell within.

Everyday we are deciding what kind of nation are we, what kind of people. Please decide to keep the Tongass National Forest an intact asset to Alaska, the Nation, and all of the people therein.

[Position]