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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Kathy O'Gara and I live in Sitka, AK. I moved to Southeast Alaska in 1982. My family has been here for much longer. I have used the Tongass for a variety of activities. I have hunted and taken personal use timber to build my house. I currently fish, explore, gather plants, sleep, camp, walk and stare in awe in the Tongass. I have bonded with old and new friends while living in and near the Forest conversing, laughing, and occasionally being surprised by a bear or deer or otter. I have introduced my children to the Forest, taught them to appreciate and take care of the Tongass as they are lucky to grow up in such an amazing place. They have traveled enough to know how true this is. I value the old growth that is left and hope it stays available to see and experience for many more generations. I value the small scale businesses that take small amounts of timber and plants and create a viable product that benefits our local communities and beyond. It takes gumption and originality to harvest and still leave the Forest intact. I am writing a comment on the Alaska Roadless Rule DEIS because I am concerned with how the Rule and the proposed full exemption will impact my subsistence harvesting, hunting, foraging for wild foods, the peace and solitude I find in nature, recreating, the status of the Tongass as a national and global treasure, the conservation of resources for future generations and the forest's ability to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change impacts.

Out of the alternatives described in the AKRR DEIS I support alternative 1: no action. The rule is working fine as it is by balancing the conservation of our fish and wildlife habitat with important development projects.. I depend on roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest for deer habitat and subsistence hunting, recreating and enjoying nature, carbon sequestration and local climate change mitigation, viewing wildlife, keeping public lands wild for future generations, fiscal responsibility and saving taxpayer dollars . A full exemption does not protect these values, nor does it effectively balance economic development and conservation of roadless area characteristics. A full exemption from the Roadless Rule and increased logging and roadbuilding will negatively impact the Tongass and what I and many others use and depend on the forest to provide for us.

The Roadless areas on the Tongass that are especially important to me are those on or around all of the inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass. I want the roadless areas in these locations to stay in roadless status in any alternative selected by the Forest Service, and be managed to provide for the uses and activities I listed above. It is important to me that the T77 and the TNC conservation priority areas retain their roadless protections.

I do not support the Forest Services preferred alternative of a full exemption. A full exemption is not in the interests of Southeast Alaskans who live in and use the Tongass National Forest. Many Alaskans have spoken in support of a no action alternative and have commented this way previously. It is not in the best interests of Southeast Alaskans to build more roads when the ones that are already there are not maintained per the prior agreement. It is not in the best interests of Southeast Alaskans to export raw logs that are too huge to process in Alaska or the United States and then have us buy the product back at inflated prices. The State of Alaska says that a full exemption is needed for rural economic development opportunities. However, a full exemption would not help create more rural economic development opportunities, it would instead harm our existing rural economies that are based on the visitor industry and commercial fishing industry.

It would further harm rural economic opportunities because pursuing the same outdated economic model of old growth clearcut harvesting for export stifles innovation and possibility in other sectors, such as mariculture, sustainable young growth harvest, rural agriculture and other local business ideas that have yet to be developed. If the Forest Service wants to support rural economic development, they should improve and streamline existing permitting processes for important community projects rather than rehashing old conflicts transition to second growth logging devote resources to support our fishing and visitor industries.

Didn't we already discuss this before? And didn't we already comment before? It is time to move forward instead of trying to recreate the past.

I urge the Forest Service to prioritize the voices of Southeast Alaskans over those of our political representation and corporate interests. Choosing a full exemption will not create a long lasting, durable solution for roadless areas on the Tongass. It will only increase the legal challenges, uncertainty for businesses, and conflict on the Tongass going forward.

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