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Comments: The Roadless Rule must be preserved for the Tongass National Forest. As the last intact old growth forest in the US it is a priceless treasure, worth so much more as a complete ecosystem than the raw materials that can be extracted from it. The repeal of this rule will open the forest up for destruction. An ancient forest can not be recovered, and the loss cannot be mitigated. The cultural importance of the forest alone should warrant its protection, but the potential diminishing quality of the environment, and loss of ecosystem services necessitate its protection.

Disrupting the forest and opening it to commercial interests will undoubtedly disrupt the many species that live there. Water quality is diminished by logging and mineral extraction practices. The rivers and streams support salmon, which are already threatened or endangered in many parts of the Pacific coast. Indigenous tribes rely on the health of these forests, waterways, and animals to survive. The health of the ocean depends on the health of the upland forest as well. Healthy forests remove pollutants from the air and filter runoff, improving environmental quality.

The future will suffer from the loss of carbon sequestration capability of the established forest. Furthermore, logging and fossil fuel extraction will exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions through the extraction, processing, use of these materials. Any supposed economic gain from the destruction of this unique ecosystem is short-lived, and worthless compared to the benefits that the intact forest provides. To move forward with the repeal of the Roadless Rule would be short-sighted and destructive, and would demonstrate that inadequate assessment of the costs and benefits had been conducted. Thorough assessment of the lasting implications of permanently altering this habitat must be conducted, including the human and environmental threats from climate change that would be accelerated by this action.

There is no way to undo such a grave mistreatment of the environment. We have witnessed this in countless other forests across the nation and the world. Now, more than ever, we need to protect the remaining wilderness such as the Tongass, and not dig ourselves deeper into unsustainable and unnecessary practices that benefit a small few while destroying the very delicate systems we rely on for our continued existence. No amount of quick money is worth permanently diminishing our planet further.

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