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I am submitting the following as a comment letter regarding the Roadless Rule on the Tongass National Forest

Concern about the management of the Tongass National Forest is not a sometime thing for the people of Sitka, Alaska.

It is an everyday concern for a community whose economy and way of life are inextricably bound by the forest on one side and the sea on the other.

The decision that is to be made this coming year by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture has the potential, in our opinion, to upset a balance of myriad interests - logging, tourism, fishing, recreation, environmental protection, to name some major ones - that have settled into a sustainable co-existence over the nearly two decades since the Tongass was covered by the national Roadless Rule in 2001.

The people of Sitka, collectively through the City and Borough Assembly's resolution and by a majority of individual comments, have stated their support for the "no-action" alternative among the roadless choices for the Tongass going forward.

With the worst effects of decades of industrial-scale logging yet to be completely remedied, we believe that this is not the time to reopen presently protected roadless areas for logging. The theoretical economic benefit of new logging must be weighed against the adverse effects on salmon streams, subsistence, tourism, and recreation, all of which provide measurable economic and social benefits to our community.

These interests, as well as a plan for the transition into sustainable second-growth logging, were taken into account in a multi-year stakeholder process resulting in the 2016 amendments to the Tongass Land Management Plan.

Contrast that effort with the hasty process in which a new group of stakeholders was appointed last year to review possibilities to replace the 2001 Roadless Rule for the Tongass. They came up with an "Alaska Roadless Rule," leaving some roadless protections in place. Under political pressure the U.S. Forest Service cast that aside, declaring "full exemption" as their preferred alternative.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Alaska Congressional delegation and Gov. Dunleavy oppose the 2001 Roadless Rule on the grounds that it impedes economic development in Southeast Alaska. Is it possible that they can yet be persuaded otherwise by the overwhelming majority of those in Southeast who dispute that view and are speaking out on the basis of their own knowledge and experience on the ground?

It is in that hope that I add my voice to the thousands in Southeast who have spoken out in support of the "no action" alternative and in favor of keeping the protection of the 2001 national Roadless Rule for the Tongass

National Forest.

I am a 50-year resident of Sitka, and editor-publisher of the Daily Sitka Sentinel. In a slightly different format the comments above were published as an editorial in the Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019, edition of the Daily Sitka Sentinel.

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