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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thirty-one years ago, I made my first trip to Southeast Alaska from the lower 48. I spent ten days in a Forest Service cabin in the Tongass National Forest. I was astounded by the vastness and wildness of the forest. Three years later, I returned and to go on a ten-day circumnavigation of Admiralty Island to study and photograph whales. The whale watching was magnificent. The scenery was equally spectacular. I found a rare place in America where the ecosystem was largely intact, where large mammals such as whales and bears thrive.

In 1992 I returned to Alaska for my second ten-day voyage circumnavigating Admiralty Island. I was hopelessly hooked. That trip inspired me to share it with others through my photographs and natural history trips. The next year, I began guiding passengers on natural history trips in Southeast Alaska. This drove me to learn more and become more involved in the Alaska community of researchers and educators. Since then I have been lucky to serve as an advisor to the Petersburg Marine Mammal Center and a Board member of the Alaska Whale Foundation.

In my early days, I quickly learned how important the Tongass was to all of the wildlife that I so loved and that astounded the passengers who come on my trips. Without the great resources of the Tongass, none of this would be possible. Shortly after I began working in Alaska, the timber industry, despite years of expensive subsidies borne by U.S. taxpayers collapsed under its own economic challenges. I also witnessed firsthand the scars left by aggressive clear cutting, despite the obvious deleterious impact to commercial fisheries and tourism.

I came to understand that the commercial fishing industry and tourism quickly replaced the lost jobs and helped the Southeast Alaska economy continue to grow. A decade later, the Roadless Rule seemed a sensible solution to protect half the Tongass from further scars. The Roadless Rule is working to protect the Tongass and, when appropriate, grant exemptions for Southeast Communities for development when necessary.

The remaining intact portions of the Tongass support a rich ecosystem, the result of the intensely complex relationships between adjacent marine environments and the forest. These interconnections sustain nutrient replenishment and intense biological productivity. The result is a highly productive marine ecosystem that directly supports salmon and marine mammal habitat.

I support Alternative 1 of the draft environmental impact statement offering a range of alternatives to roadless management taking no action and leaving all of Alaska under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including the Tongass National Forest. A clear majority of citizens support the protection of the Roadless rule, as do many of the organizations representing the voices of indigenous communities. I do as well.

Sincerely,

Jim Nahmens

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