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Comments: On Management of the Tongass Rainforest

To whom it may concern,

As an American citizen and as a consumer, I have a personal stake in the management of the Tongass Rainforest, not just for its beauty and value as a carbon sink, but for the commercial value it provides as a source of salmon. According to the Draft Environmental Impact statement, there are 6 "alternatives" presented for managing the Tongass Rainforest. In this comment, I would like to briefly explain why the preferred alternative of the forestry service, alternative 6, is incredibly foolish, and why alternative 2 is a far better option for long-term economic benefit.

Alternative 6 exempts 9.2 million acres, over half of the Tongass rainforest, from the 2001 roadless rule. The Environmental Impact Statement states at the bottom of page 30: "Timber harvest levels are expected to remain the same for all alternatives." I do not know how they reached that conclusion, but even if that were true, it still matters significantly where roads are constructed and where timber harvesting takes place.

I've put a link at the bottom to a map of T77 watersheds(1). It is a list of areas designated as watersheds not under permanent protection that are key for salmonid habitats in Southeast Alaska, the same region as the Tongass rainforest, which was determined by a scientific assessment of the coastal forests and mountains. Salmon fishing is a vital industry for the local communities, one that requires the tongass rainforest, specifically these watersheds, to remain protected and undeveloped. Timber harvesting anywhere near these watersheds would erode the soil, dirtying the water and harming the salmon, making them less numerous. Road production as well has a harmful effect on nearby watersheds. By the Forest Service's own admission(2), roads a major contributor to soil erosion and stream sedimentation, which contributes to the destruction of aquatic habits. To build roads or harvest timber anywhere near these watersheds would seriously harm the local fishing industry, and make salmon less plentiful, thereby becoming more expensive, making it more difficult for people like myself to gain access to a treasured commodity. Yet under alternative 6, many of these key watersheds would be open to harmful road construction and timber harvest.

Alternative 2, on the other hand, provides the most protection to these watersheds, designating 3.25 million acres for protection of the T77 watersheds, ensuring the permanent protection of the local economy. Additionally, there is a net gain total acreage under the roadless rule, making The Tongass rainforest far less at risk for forest fragmentation, which occurs as a consequence of development. if a road were constructed through a forest, or timber harvested deep within the forest, it would disturb the forest as a whole, leading to the loss of biodiversity, increase of invasive plant species, and a general degradation of the entire ecosystem. It is a well documented contributor to habitat degradation. I mention this because alternative 3 offers similar protection for T77 watersheds, but still exempts a significant portion of the forest from the roadless rule. Because all things are interconnected, any significant harm to the rainforest would inevitably have a domino effect, and eventually harm these key watersheds. It is yet another reason why it matters where timber harvesting is allowed to happen. And as an aside, fragmentation would also make practicing forestry as a profession less viable, which would also harm the local economy.

In this comment I've focused on the T77 watersheds and forest fragmentation but there are in fact many other reasons to pursue alternative 2, both economic and moral. Alternative 2 is without a doubt the best way to ensure the prevention of fragmentation and general habitat destruction, as well as the future economic prosperity of local communities that depend on this forest for their livelihoods. It is the best option because it preserves the tongass

rainforest better than any other plan. I understand the political pressure that exists to pursue alternative 6, but I hope you seriously consider what I have written, and that you make your decision accordingly, not based on political pressures, but on what is desired by the communities that depend on the preservation of the Tongass.

Sincerely, Noah Tamas-Parris

Sources:

1) T77 Watersheds

https://ak.audubon.org/sites/default/files/t77_subsection_seak_atlas_ch07_human_uses_200dpi.pdf

2) Roads as a contributor to soil erosion

https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/ja_grace010.pdf

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