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First name: Mitchell

Last name: Parsons

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Comment on Alaska Roadless Rule

Hello.

I am writing in opposition to the decision to remove roadless area protections from Tongass National Forest (alternative six) for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed Alaska Roadless Rule. While I understand that this decision opens only a fraction of the forest to timber harvest, the argument for the majority of the forest, that removing additional protections is acceptable because the forest is already protected elsewhere, is lackluster reasoning. This alternative simply removes one layer of protection while so clearly illustrating that current protections are not permanent. If the desired outcome is to bring 185,000 acres of previously designated roadless areas "into the set of lands that may be considered for timber harvest," that develop and select an alternative that accomplishes that without putting the rest of this unique forest in line for future peril. The only reason to remove roadless protections from the entire forest to gain such a relatively small area of harvestable timber is so that the remaining forest is slightly less protected if future lawmakers wish to open up more of it.

Further, Tongass National Forest is one of the few remnants of temperate rain forest in the United States, and deserves the protection due to its importance for flora, fauna, and carbon sequestration. The majority of temperate rain forest in the continental US has been heavily impacted by timber harvest. Threatening the remaining portions of this habitat would negatively affect conservation and climate change goals that our country should be pursuing. Growing up in Washington, I've spent time in temperate rain forest and admired its incredible and unique beauty. I've also seen that even when areas are conserved, the most productive, lowland forests are given up for timber harvest, while the foothills and mountains sides are designated as National Parks and Wilderness Areas. Yes, we have Olympic National Park and Mt. Rainier National Park, but the historically most productive, continuous, and valuable portions of this habitat have been harvested multiple times over. When discussing the possibility of removing protections from forested lands, any lands, describing it purely by acreage is a disservice to everyone, as the relative value of the land can not be quantified simply by its surface area.

For these reasons, I do not support the selected alternative six, and believe a more appropriate solution is alternative 3 or the no-action alternative. Opening up small portions of the forest that are close to previously harvested sections, and promoting the development and incorporation of local communities into these decisions is extremely important. Alternative 3 would allow for harvest in areas that would most benefit local communities, accomplishing the desired outcome of rural development, while still leaving in place protections for one of the most valuable and unique ecosystems on our planet.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Parsons

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