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First name: Gia

Last name: Neswald

Organization:

Title:

Comments: [CAUTION: Suspicious Link]Comments on Alaska Petition exempting Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule

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Regarding the Alaska Petition to exempt Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule, I support Alternative 1, leaving the rule in place as is.

No additional lands should be opened for timber harvest in this precious forest, whether of old-growth or younger. Recent, peer-reviewed science shows that 50% of the carbon is stored in the largest 1% of trees; this is a commonly accepted fact. Recent scientific studies also show that intact forests sequester carbon at higher rates than those which are subjected to management by forestry (William R. Moomaw, Jared S. Nunery & William S. Keeton, Mark G. Anderson to name a few). This largest intact temperate rainforest is a tremendous carbon sink and is most valuable as such, giving much toward our most critical need, both nationally and globally. This richly biodiverse and widely cherished area would be violated by clear-cutting or increased selective timber harvest, whatever the purpose.

Alternatives to improving communications and emergency access within the forest must be pursued only if possible within the parameters of current and traditional land uses, rather than according to development models. Promotion of these goals is, frankly, the whitewashing of state and corporate dealmaking. I have learned from my Alaska friends that these concerns are not their own. The needs of local communities must neither be dictated nor diverted for exploitation as propaganda for political and corporate agendas. Similarly, claims that hydropower is clean and renewable and of "sustainable harvest of timber and forest products" are not accepted as true or justification for relaxing the regulations under consideration. Furthermore, as a citizen of the U.S. and a resident of the world, I can say that no infrastructure development or harvest of resources should take precedence over maximizing the carbon storage and continual carbon sequestration of this great forest by leaving intact areas as they are, and allowing them to grow naturally.

Were the rule relaxed, it would open up opportunities for mining operations on lands that had been protected. All mining activities are ecologically and culturally detrimental to the degree of irreversible damage. Tourism, carbon storage, cultural heritage and traditional ways of life would all be harmed long-term or forever by any mining activity. I oppose all such activity in the Tongass. Irregardless of what federal archeologists may find in regards to specific projects, it is true that any disruptive activity will affect cultural heritage sites. As stated in the U.S.F.S. webpage on the Tongass, "Alaska Natives have continuously inhabited the Tongass for more than 10,000 years, residing with salmon, bears, wolves, eagles, and whales. The first nations include the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian. Living from the land is still a way of life here, a cultural tradition as well as a necessity, supported by the abundance of fish and wildlife in the region. People from all over the world are passionate about the Tongass. The Forest Service strives to find the right balance, so that people may continue to find both inspiration and a way of life in this vast, unparalleled place." This is enough reason to maintain current protections of the entire forest, biodiversity and human traditional living ways. Abandoning any of the restrictions of the Roadless Rule would and will lead to irreparable losses for all three aforementioned. Tourism is such a big part of the Alaskan economy for the very reason of its preserved land and indigenous culture. Investing in this economy is the deal of the century. Direct more funds to supporting traditional cultural heritage, artisans and

education, rather than into land development. No commercial extraction, whether of timber or minerals, will pay into the economy in such a sustained way as tourism. We can no longer afford to act based on short-term corporate profits. That would be a disservice to the people of Alaska, and to the rest of us. I can promise you that many tourists like myself would not be able to bring ourselves to come back to our favorite places in the Tongass if they had been cut through or blasted open.

The U.S. Forest Service under the current administration has opened up for industrial activity some of the most sacred sites on the continent to mineral extraction, some which are deeply important to me personally and all of which are sacred to indigenous communities with longstanding ceremonial traditions at these places. This is unacceptable. There is no reason to believe that cultural sites in Tongass will be treated with more respect. Furthermore, the corruption exemplified by the Midas Gold company leading the impacts assessment of their own project for mining in Idaho will not be repeated. There are many eyes on the Tongass!

The U.S. Forest Service has lost my confidence as an agency of land management and I will not support any increased decision-making power for this agency, as long as the current federal Administration is in place. In my own home area, a recent agreement between the U.S.F.S. and private land trusts has our community vigilant for underhanded deals. In short, the U.S. Forest Service needs to keep its hands off protected lands, period, with no relaxation of protections, no modification of land classifications and no regulatory changes, unless they serve to tighten and/or expand protections for the lands towards a goal of intact forests or a strategy of Proforestation. The U.S. Forest Service cannot at once proudly display "the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world" while making plans to cut into and through it. The world is watching and will continue to exert pressure against any such attempts.

Thank you for your consideration,

Gia Neswald

Turners Falls, MA 01376

[Position]