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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Alaska Roadless Rule

Bryan Benkman

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US Forest Service

I am commenting on the reconsideration of the Roadless Rule in Southeast Alaska. I believe retaining the Roadless Rule, Alternative one, is by far the best and only choice.

I have fished commercially in SE Alaska for 43 years on a salmon purse seiner. I have become very familiar with most of southeast. As a fisherman I know that my livelihood depends on a healthy ecosystem. Much of southeast, and especially Prince of Wales Island has been degraded from the logging roads, culverts, and logging.

As a crewman in 1980, the skipper called me to the bridge. He knew I loved to look for salmon jumping, and he had a question. "Which way are they going?" We had run to Long Island in Cordova Bay, west of Prince of Wales, and were by Coning Inlet. The scene was amazing. Pink salmon were jumping both ways close to the beach. Lots of them. We counted the jumps and decided which way to set our seine. We almost loaded the boat that day.

I began running my own seiner the next year and returned many times through the 80's and early 90's to Coning Inlet in the middle of August and often found very productive pink salmon fishing. Then one year we came to Coning Inlet, and instead of a beautiful forested landscape, the hillside looked like a wasteland. The Sea Alaska native corporation had logged the Island. That year we still caught some pink salmon, they had been at sea while their natal stream had been virtually destroyed. The next year we came back and there were few fish to be found.

Over the next 20 years, until I retired in 2016, I often came to the south and east side of Long Island in the middle of August, hoping to find a return of the plentiful pink salmon run. Never since the logging of Long Island have they come back.

That's one location I'm very familiar with, and I'm sure there are others. We need to protect what is left of the healthy ecosystem in SE Alaska to protect spawning and rearing habitat.

The healthy forest is also a very valuable carbon sink, which is one of the cheapest ways to fight climate change.

Therefore, I support retaining Alternative One.

Thank you.

Bryan Benkman

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