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Title:
Comments: HC3144

U.S. Forest Service Alaska Roadless Rule Committee:

On behalf of the thousands of fly fishing businesses across this country whose livelihoods depend on the health and protection of our fisheries and habitat, the American Fly Fishing Trade Association (AFFTA) strongly urges the U.S. Department of Agriculture to select the No Action Alternative as its preferred alternative identified in the Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

AFFTA is the sole trade organization for the fly fishing industry in the United States. We are also the largest recreational angling trade association in the country, with over 1,200 current members made up of manufacturers, specialty retailers, sales reps, guides, outfitters, media professionals, and conservation partners from every state in the U.S., including many in Alaska.

Over 380,000 miles of roads - eight times the 47,500 miles of U.S. Interstate Highways- have been constructed on our National Forest Lands1 directly impacting fish and wildlife, water quality, and recreational opportunities. Fish and aquatic species are particularly susceptible to the effects of roads. Increased sedimentation raises stream temperatures and decreases dissolved oxygen essentially suffocating fish while also burying spawning beds critical to their reproduction and sustainability.

Roadless areas in the Tongass contain highly productive fish habitat and unspoiled wilderness that are critical to the vibrant and ever-growing fishing, guide/outfitter, and tourism industries of southeast Alaska. Combined, they contribute more than $2 billion in economic activity and roughly 26% of jobs in the region annually. That sustainable economic engine is entirely too much to risk for any other sort of short-term gain that development might offer.

The repeal of the Roadless Rule shouldn't even be part of the conversation, let alone an actual consideration. The Tongass National Forest is unfortunately one of the few remaining places in our country where wild salmon and trout thrive, and the rich wilderness and teeming rivers are left unspoiled by development. To remove these protections would be a travesty for the fishery, the local community and fly fishing businesses across the state and nation.

This land is our land. America's Salmon Forest belongs to all of us and needs to stay intact so that future generations of fly anglers will be able to experience and enjoy it, not lament its loss.

Ben Bulis

President

American Fly Fishing Trade Association

Sincerely,

Ben Bulis

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