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Organization:

Title:

Comments: HC5443

U.S. Forest Service Alaska Roadless Rule Committee:

Hello, my name is John Norris and I live in Worthington Ohio. I support keeping the Roadless Rule Tongass. My wife and I are both avid fisher people and have a trip planed in 2021 to visit the Tongass. In addition I have three kids who also fish and they are very upset with the current administration and the disregard for the environment and clean waters. I believe that we have a moral responsibility to protect key wildlife areas and salmon watersheds such as the Tongass 77, it is important for the economy and way of life in Southeast Alaska.

The Roadless Rule is working. It now conserves 58 million acres of fish and wildlife habitat, recreation areas, drinking - water resources and other lakes, rivers and streams across the National Forest system, which in turn protect our salmon and our tourism and recreation economy. The Rule protects more than 9 million acres on the Tongass, preventing the expansion of clear-cut logging of old-growth timber.

The Roadless Rule has already been through the public process. More than 1.6 million people commented during the rulemaking process in 2001, and 95% of them supported strong protections for roadless areas. Public comments in 2018 and 2019 have also overwhelmingly supported retaining the rule in Alaska.

The Roadless Rule struck the right balance by allowing energy, infrastructure and other development activities. All 58 applications for development activities in Tongass Roadless Areas, mainly associated with mineral exploration and hydropower development, have been granted. Approval generally takes just 1-3 weeks. The Tongass is a national treasure. As our largest national forest and part of the largest remaining intact temperate rainforest in the world, the Tongass has a unique assemblage of plants, animals and fish found in vast and sustainable numbers. It is a place like no other.

Tongass produces 80% of the salmon harvested on the National Forest system (about 50 million annually). The Tongass hosts the highest density of nesting bald eagles and brown bear in the world. More than 50 animal species feed on Tongass salmon when they return to spawn.

The Roadless Rule protects fish and wildlife. The Tongass produces more salmon than all other National Forests, combined. Roadless areas and places like the Tongass 77 contain highly -productive fish habitat that is critical to local fishing and tourism industries, which combine to contribute more than \$2 billion in economic activity and roughly 26% of jobs in the region, annually.

Tongass is a globally important carbon sink. The Tongass stores 8% of all the carbon stored in America's forests and, in doing so, helps reduce the impacts for climate change.

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We don't need more roads. Tongass National Forest already has more than 5,000 miles of permanent logging roads transecting its landscape to access timber.

Road construction on the Tongass is expensive. American taxpayers have spent more than \$600 million building logging roads on the Tongass over the past 20 years. According to the Taxpayers for Common Sense, USFS could end up losing more than \$180 million in the Tongass over the next four years.

We can't take care of existing Tongass roads. Congressional sources pin the Tongass road maintenance backlog at roughly \$68 million. The Forest Service estimates it has a backlog of more than \$100 million in watershed restoration needs.

Roads are bad for fish. The Forest Service has surveyed 3,687 places where roads cross fish streams on the Tongass (culverts and bridges) and found 33 % of them fail to meet standards to allow fish migration. That means there are more than 1,200 places on the Tongass where roads don't allow fish to migrate past at all life stages! We applaud the Forest Service's on-going efforts to fix these problems, but we never should have gotten here in the first place and we question the logic behind adding to the problem.

I hope that you reconsider the poor decision that the current administration is about to make.

Thank you

John E. Norris

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