

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/13/2025 12:31:09 AM

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Comments: My name is Ryan Morse. I am writing today to share my thoughts and feedback on the 2025 Draft assessment for the Tongass Forest Revision process.

I have lived in Sitka on the Tongass my entire life. I harvest and process wild foods for my family and friends, recreate on the Tongass, and dream of living in Southeast Alaska for the rest of my life.

The purpose of this assessment is to tell the story of where we are now, so that we can figure out what needs to change in the new plan. The agency has heard the priorities of Southeast Alaska communities through extensive outreach and engagement processes over the past 6 years. The 2025 Draft Assessment should accurately reflect Southeast Alaskans priorities: protecting the functioning ecosystems of the Tongass National Forest, working collaboratively and towards co-stewardship with tribal governments and local communities, prioritizing subsistence harvesting, and investing in a more diversified economy that includes large and small-scale tourism, commercial and sports fishing, and recreation. These are the priorities that should define the need for change.

As we continue through this assessment phase, I want to re-emphasize the priorities that are especially important to me. I think that the current forest plan does not adequately address these priorities and needs to be updated accordingly. These priorities are widely held by Southeast Alaskans and should be reflected in the need for change.

The new Forest Plan should recognize the Tongass as the traditional homelands of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples who have lived here since time immemorial. Subsistence, harvesting wild foods, traditional uses, and food security are the highest priorities for many people on the Tongass, and the Forest should be managed accordingly. The Forest Service should prioritize opportunities for outdoor recreation on the Tongass. The Tongass should be evaluated for its benefits as a carbon sink, while still allowing for sustainable use of the forest by local peoples for recreation, subsistence, cultural use, and more. The USDA should protect old growth forests for climate mitigation, salmon and deer habitat, and also provide pathways for traditional and cultural use of forest species like red and yellow cedar. I would like to see the Forest Service focus on uplifting local workforce development, partnering with local entities and Tribes, and drive their forest management by community priorities. I want to see traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous values incorporated into the Forest Plan.

I am grateful that the Forest Service is investing in creating a more holistic Forest Plan with community-driven feedback. I am also glad that the Forest Service is bringing in extra resources to support tribal engagement. I hope that this work continues.

Thank you for considering my input and the input of Southeast Alaskan communities during this important process.