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Organization:

Title:

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

My activities include photography, harvest wild foods, culture, healthy lifestyle, small business (photography, publishing).

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.

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. Climate change is a top community concern across the region, and the role that the forest plays in adaptation and mitigation needs to be considered throughout the Forest Plan. The Forest Service should prioritize opportunities for outdoor recreation on the Tongass. The Forest Plan should seek a balance in creating opportunities for sustainable small-scale tourism, and protecting local priority areas from overuse. 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 Tongass should be managed to prioritize healthy salmon habitat and salmon-producing watersheds and have 300 stream buffers. 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 want to see traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous values incorporated into the Forest Plan.

One thing that I believe is missing from the Draft Assessment as it is currently written is the focus on salmon as a keystone species. The Aquatic Ecosystems section in particular does not adequately document the social, economic, and cultural importance of salmon in the region. For myself and other Southeast Alaskans, salmon represent more than food: they represent a way of life that is tied to our ways of life and our economies. Wild salmon, all five species are precious to our community.. they sustain the forest, the forest sustains them. They sustain eagles, ducks, migratory birds, wildlife, people, culture, and our health and our way of life.

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.

A forest is a community and should be managed as a community.. not as a resource to be harvested. Maintain Tongass as roadless. Keep WILD salmon and indigenous cultures alive and well. It's why we live here.

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