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

I care deeply about the Tongass because it is the foundation of our way of life in Yakutat. My partner and I depend on the Tongass for our food, livelihood, and cultural traditions. We hunt, fish, and harvest wild foods, relying on the health of the forest and rivers to sustain us. My partner guides on the Arklín River, and the strength of our local economy and food security is directly tied to the health of the Tongass. Protecting Yakutat means protecting our ability to live as we always have providing for ourselves, practicing our culture, and ensuring that future generations can do the same.

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. 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 Forest Service should continue to support a transition to a young growth harvest timber economy. 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.

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. Across rural Southeast Alaska, residents use an average of 75 pounds of salmon per person each year, and nearly 90% of rural households here use salmon. Commercial salmon fishing in Southeast Alaska supports a global economy and food chain and employs 15% of Southeast Alaskans, more than any other private sector. 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. Salmon are the lifeblood of our community in Yakutat. They sustain us physically, culturally, and economically. For generations, our people have depended on salmon not just as a food source, but as a way of lifethrough traditional fishing practices, sharing with our families, and teaching the next generation about stewardship and respect for the land and waters.

Economically, salmon support local jobs, from commercial and subsistence fishing to guiding and tourism. My partner guides on the Arklin River, where healthy salmon runs are essential to both his livelihood and our community's well-being. Culturally, salmon are central to our

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.

One critical omission in the draft assessment is the recognition of clan lands and the deep, long-standing relationships that Indigenous peoples have with these lands. In Yakutat and across Southeast Alaska, the Tongass is not just public land it is the unceded homeland of the Tlingit people, with distinct areas belonging to different clans. These lands hold cultural, spiritual, and historical significance that cannot be separated from the management of the forest.

Decisions about the Tongass must honor Indigenous sovereignty, traditional land stewardship, and the inherent rights of clans to protect and manage their lands. This includes meaningful consultation with tribal governments, clan leaders, and local Indigenous communities to ensure that their knowledge, priorities, and land rights are fully integrated into forest management policies.

Additionally, the assessment should explicitly acknowledge the role of Indigenous stewardship in maintaining the health of salmon populations, forests, and watersheds. Indigenous land management has sustained these ecosystems for thousands of years, and any future conservation strategy must recognize and support these traditional practices.

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