

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/23/2025 2:17:22 PM

First name: Karen

Last name: Johnson

Organization:

Title:

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

I am a life long resident of Sitka Alaska and have participated in subsistence, commercial and sport fishing for over 50 years. My parents, Moses and Amy Johnson taught our family to care for the environment, to understand the importance of a healthy ecosystem. We rely on the Tongass for our way of life whether it be commercial fishing, subsistence harvesting or going out and enjoying its amazing diversity. I am a commercial fisherman and a naturalist and I care deeply about the health of the Tongass.

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.

At this time I would like to re-emphasize some of 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. 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.

Salmon are the life blood of Alaska, they keep the ecosystem healthy in different ways throughout their lifecycle. They require a healthy habitat in order to survive and that means healthy forests, streams, air and oceans. My community, my state rely on salmon for food, culture, jobs and more. There is no accurate way to quantify their value, they are priceless and their habitat should be guaranteed the protection it needs.

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.

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

process.