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

I care about the Tongass because I harvest deer, fish, berries, mushrooms, and other resources from the Tongass. My friends and family have jobs that depend on an intact Tongass national forest guiding tourists, fishing trips, wilderness expeditions, and working on tourist stores in town for visitors that come to see the intact forest. Other neighbors that live in my neighborhood are commercial fishermen whose fish for salmon that are produced by the Tongass national forest's intact watersheds and salmon runs.

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. the

majority of the people who live in my neighborhood working in commercial fisheries and focus on salmon. salmon bring in millions of dollars in revenue to my community and all these salmon come from the Tongass. The assessment doesn't do enough to focus on the Tongass as a salmon producing forest and the current conditions and needs for managing for salmon. The Forest Service and the plan for Tongass management needs to have a higher consideration of salmon and the conditions needed for management for salmon to protect salmon runs, augment production of salmon, ensure that salmon can be resilient to the impacts of climate change, and measure and focus management activities for salmon.

In addition to commercial harvest of salmon, I rely on subsistence harvest of salmon to survive economically in Southeast Alaska where the cost of living is significantly higher than other parts of the country.

The forest management plan needs to change because the previous plan focuses on timber harvest with considerations made for salmon only as a secondary resource. The management plan is set up to manage for timber resources and only seeks to mitigate impacts on salmon. The reality is that the management plan should focus on salmon as the primary resource the forest produces with timber as a secondary objective.

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.

Specifically regarding timber harvest, the Forest Plan should no longer allow any export harvest of timber-- especially export to China. Timber should be harvested to create economic value in Southeast Alaska with a focus on manufacturing end-products for Alaskan markets. The scale of timber harvest will never be as high as it was in the past which is absolutely expected and is consistent with the pattern of timber harvest in other places where there was an immense boom when old growth and original forests were harvested as a boom-industry. This happened in the Adirondacks of upstate New York, in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and in the Pacific Northwest. After the initial huge boom, the level of harvest significantly decreased until a much lower sustained yield was achieved through modern forestry practices. The Tongass has experienced its boom and there is no longer an economically feasible supply of old growth timber that can be harvested.

The Forest Plan needs to be changed to account for the fact that old growth timber has been exhausted and is no longer economically viable at the scale to support the export oriented mills in the region (this includes both export to other countries and also export to mills in the Lower 48).

Any further harvest of old growth timber should focus on high value in-region manufacturing-- this includes cultural use wood for carving arts and community and tribal projects which should be the highest priority.

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