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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to you today regarding a the Tongass Draft Assessment findings

Dear Tongass Plan Revision,

I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining an intact, healthy Tongass National Forest through the upcoming Revision Plan, and for specific components of the draft assessment centered around this goal. A well-preserved Tongass is essential to my way of life and that of my community, sustaining fish, wildlife, and biodiversity. The plan must protect intact land and water resources to ensure long-term ecosystem health, in addition to supporting resilient, thriving cultural resources, economies, and communities in the region.

The draft assessment highlights several priority areas for me personally that are also areas which require robust protection, including:

- Homelands, sacred places, and traditional harvesting grounds of Alaska Native people,

Alaskan natives as with other tribes throughout our nation know how to tend to the land better than any other human. They have been here for millenia and should be allowed to do as they please

- Subsistence - both customary and traditional uses

- The temperate rainforest archipelago and ecosystems

- Salmon runs and other wildlife habitat

- Recreation and scenic beauty

I share in the draft plan's endorsement of stronger protections for these areas and encourage the Forest Service to retain these sections of the plan. I urge the Forest Service to integrate Indigenous Knowledge and subsistence rights into the plan. Traditional Ecological Knowledge strengthens conservation and ensures resilience for future generations. A co-stewardship model for managing the Tongass honors the rights and sovereignty of Tribal Governments.

The inclusion of protections for small timber mill operators is also extremely important to include in the Forest Plan Revision. Small timber mills have helped create and sustain communities across Southeast Alaska but are often outbid, forced out of timber sales that they depend on by larger mills.

Many Southeast Alaskans want to see meaningful change in the timber industry, and the entire region would directly benefit from the transition away from archaic clear cutting to truly sustainable logging practices. We need to maintain biodiversity throughout our forest systems for them to be able to continue to thrive. Monocultures of any species is a detriment to not only the animal kingdom but to ours as well. Humans will continue to strive forward but only if a balance can be maintained.

Environmental and profiteering threats could degrade the Tongass, harming ecosystems and communities. The new Tongass Forest Plan must prioritize protections that uphold the integrity of the Tongass's vast ecosystems and align with the draft assessment's findings as well as local knowledge and support for a balanced approach. By doing so, the Forest Service will safeguard the long-term sustainability of this vital forest.

Thank you for considering my input. I urge you to prioritize Tongass protections in this forest plan revision.

Sincerely,

Ms. Gillian Welsch