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First name: Patricia

Last name: Nielsen

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Tongass Forest Plan Revision Assessment Team,

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

camping, harvesting wild food- preserving nature

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.

I want to see traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous values incorporated into the Forest Plan. 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. The Tongass should be managed to prioritize healthy salmon habitat and salmon-producing watersheds and have 300' stream buffers. 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 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. 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.

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. All species are important in the web of life and humans are destroying our own place that we live and nature we depend on

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.

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

process.

Regards,
Patricia Nielsen