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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Tongass Forest Plan Revision Assessment Team,

My name is Cosley Bruno. 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 it is the land that raised me and given me an identity that causes me to be a contributing member to my community. On the first day of the 3rd grade, I raced to get out the door five minutes before my mom and younger brother. Independence was in at the time, and I did not want to arrive at school with my usual convoy. I peddled my bicycle as hard as I could down the dirt road I knew so well. Watching me from the horizon was the Fairweather Mountain Range without any clouds to block the view. I took this sight for granted that day. I like to think about the stories Mt Fairweather holds. It has seen glaciers carve rough ranges, smooth, and it stood as the sheet of ice melted, giving way to Glacier Bay. Fairweather was always invited to my family dinners. It would sit out our window, framed, as if it were a picture hanging on the wall. From community potlucks with homemade music to the killing of my first grouse to the car crash that changed my best friend's life, Mt. Fairweather has stood to see it all. A solid wave of peaks that cycles from blue, silver, purple, and sometimes pink watched me succeed and messed up over and over again. It is a new mindset for me, but I am working to see Mt. Fairweather as my guardian and not just a view. A fish jumps in the shallow water of the Salmon River as my brother and I burn brush on our father's new property. It is early autumn which means time for projects and harvesting must be balanced because the deadline of the first snow is creeping closer. I continue adding to the burn pile while my brother runs to get his pole, hoping for a sockeye over a pink salmon. The older he and I get the more we want to contribute. What once used to be a chore has begun to feel like a reward. Further downstream is the bridge that connects both sides of town, much like how the river connects to the ocean. After a long day on the water, I sit with my family in the back of our boat that is trailered to our truck. As we drive over the bridge I take in the view of the slack tide that kisses high up on the banks. It is calm enough to reflect the half-moon, which is illuminated by the last bits of the summer sun. Today we collected two halibuts, three buckets of bull kelp, and five coho salmon. Once we unload we start cutting and canning which is my favorite part. Fish turn into fillets and get set aside to be smoked, and the bull kelp turns into a mess of salsa. It is a subsistence party, and everyone has a step in the process. Summer and fall gatherings have become seasons I revolve my life around. It allows me to connect with my community through our shared backyard, and there is no better feeling than opening a can of smoked fish in the middle of the winter. The Salmon River has taught me which tides are best for fishing, and which bends hide the best berry spots. Most importantly it has shown me how it gives to those who know how to collect

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. 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 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 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. Not only they are my favorite food. They have taught me how to live! They have taught me the importance of to contributing to systems greater than yourself. When they bring all their nutrients from the ocean back up to their home river the further the ecosystem and give health to the stream. They have taught me how to adapt and be resilient. Salmon show how to interconnected the world is and they encourage us to give our selves to our community and our surroundings.

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.

This matters for everyone. We have an opportunity to be an example to the rest of the world! Put Indigenous stewardship as leadership and let them show us how to move forward responsibly

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

Regards,
Cosley Bruno