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First name: Narina

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Tongass Forest Plan Revision Assessment Team,

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

Clearcutting these beautiful places will increase fire risk, drive species to extinction, pollute our rivers and streams, and destroy world-class recreation sites.

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 protect the functioning ecosystems of the Tongass National Forest, working collaboratively and towards co-stewardship with tribal governments and local communities, 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.

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 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 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.

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 there 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 others, salmon represent more than food: they represent a way of life that is tied to our ways of life and our economies. Salmon are high in omega-3s, which can help with brain function and reduce the risk of heart disease.

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.

Trump's latest attempt to circumvent endangered species laws that shield about 400 species in national forests, including grizzly bears, spotted owls and wild salmon, and warned an increase in logging could pollute the water supply relied upon by millions of Americans.

Thank you for considering my input during this important process.

Regards,

Narina Schulz