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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Public Comment: Alaska Roadless Rule

Attached is my public comment on the Alaska Roadless Rule.

Thank you,

Gabrielle Bonck

The following text was copy/pasted from an attached letter. The system cannot display the formatting, graphics, or tables from the attached original.

Gabrielle Bonck

Ketchikan High School Alumna, Class of 2015

Wasilla, AK 99654

26 November 2019

USDA Forest Service

Attn: Alaska Roadless Rule

P.O. Box 21628

Juneau, Alaska 99802

akroadlessrule@usda.gov

Dear Forest Service Review Board,

I am writing in opposition to the proposed full reversal (alternative six) of the Roadless Rule in the Tongass National Forest.

I was fifteen when I moved to Ketchikan, at the end of my freshman year of high school. My family made the move from Gulfport, Mississippi because my mom held fond memories of her high school years living in Anchorage. But she didn't want to move back to Anchorage, so she toured Southeast looking for the perfect place for us, and she chose Ketchikan.

Over the next three years I fell hard for 'the rock' (Ketchikan). Through sports, I was able to travel to multiple islands in Southeast and participant in extended trips to Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula. My first job was as a crossing guard in downtown Ketchikan, protecting hordes of tourists from cars and answering all their silly questions about elevation, igloos, and which type of currency was accepted. I hiked more than I ever imagined I would, I learned to be patient while bobbing on a boat waiting (wishing) for halibut to bite, I built muscle pulling up crab and prawn pots, and most importantly, I learned the complete uselessness of umbrellas in the unrelenting rain and winds of typical Southeast storms. Which in Mississippi would easily qualify as tropical storms or possibly even hurricanes but were never stressed about on 'the rock'.

Like most kids from Ketchikan, I decided to attend university outside of Alaska and came back to the Southeastern United States to attend the University of New Orleans to pursue a degree in Biology. Nearly every school break, I hop on a plane (two actually) and fly back to my adoptive home. My family has since moved to Wasilla and I am now learning a whole new set of skills that accompany a good life in Southcentral Alaska. As I look forward to graduation and the start of my career, I have realized how blessed Alaskans are to live in such a pristine environment, relatively untouched by humans and not at the mercy of neighboring states with different environmental rules and regulations.

The Tongass is the largest and last remaining intact old-growth temperate rainforest in the world. It is a massive carbon sink and buffer to the current impacts of human-induced climate change. Intact forests are the most productive for an ecosystem and the species who rely on them. The proposed road construction and timber harvesting would fragment the forest and create larger edge effects than what is currently seen from the Roadless Rule exemption between 2003 and 2011 when numerous "roaded roadless" areas were created. Fragmentation and edge effects reduce the functional size of a forest and lead to decreases in biodiversity and increases in non-native, invasive species.

The Tongass is home to precious natural resources and species: large coniferous trees, black bears, deer, wolves, mountain lions, pacific salmon, and the emblem of our nation, the bald eagle. In the Federal Register notice, the Forest Service acknowledges the "broad agreement that the circumstances of the Tongass National

Forest are unique in a number of respects," largely its size, including 3.6 million acres of key watersheds in relation to fisheries, its percentage of roadless areas and the 32 communities that make up the Southeast region.

The question of how to balance economic development and environmental protection should be a simple one; protect the environment and invest in green, environmentally minded economies. Tourists do not come to Alaska to see large swaths of clear-cut forests; they come to escape their cities and immerse themselves in nature. Salmon need protection from the warming planet, trees shade streams that rejuvenate our stocks. Subsistence hunters rely on the forest to sustain their prey throughout the year and ensure that they can pass traditions on to the next generation.

I understand the state's desire to control what happens within its borders but alternatives three, four, five and six (the preferred) would only hurt us in the long run. All show a net reduction in the protected acreage of the Tongass. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people." Now more than ever do we need those lungs and the strength derived from nature.

Please take into account the submitted public comments and consider all alternatives as valid alternatives, including one and two. This ruling will change the future of forest protection standards across the nation, it cannot be taken lightly or driven by political advantage.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Bonck

[Position]