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Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I request the state-specific roadless rule be the same as the current roadless rule with no changes for the following reasons.

At the Petersburg meeting which I attended, the introductory presentation by Forest Service and State of Alaska officials was intentionally misleading. The rationale given for the need to change the rule was that it would remove restrictions to economic opportunities in rural communities. I asked what projects had been blocked by the roadless rule. The officials could not name one that had been blocked in the 17 years since the roadless rule was enacted. The language in the roadless rule is very specific to logging and logging roads, and does not prevent the vast majority of infrastructure development projects that would bring economic benefit to rural communities. The discussion was a farce because everyone in the room knows that this is about the timber industry gaining access to the valuable timber within the roadless areas. The forests have been so depleted of marketable timber that the Forest Service is struggling to find enough to supply the one large mill left in the Tongass, and so wants access to the timber within the roadless areas. Portraying the roadless rule as an impediment to economic development in rural communities was an intentional deception and a disservice to the public who owns the land. The Forest Service and State officials would have gained some respect if they had just said straight out that this is largely about gaining access to old growth timber.

Another problem with the public process is the makeup of the public advisory committee which was created to find solutions to the supposed problems created by the roadless rule. The representation of the various stakeholder groups is disproportionately represented by timber interests. The timber industry makes up only a small part of the economy of South east Alaska, yet a disproportionate number of representatives are on the committee. If the committee truly represented a proportionally accurate number of timber industry interests, they would be far outnumbered by stakeholders who benefit from the roadless rule as it stands. The salmon industry and the visitor industries are the drivers of our economy and therefore they should be accurately represented.

The Forest Service has a legal obligation to maintain viable wildlife populations, yet is going about business as usual despite the ever-growing dangers of climate change. Climate change is putting the survival of the forests and salmon streams at great risk, so every effort should be being made to mitigate the impacts of our rapidly changing climate. Old growth logging should be stopped now and salmon streams should be inventoried as to their vulnerability to increased temperatures and siltation from flooding events. Management of the Tongass should be based on salmon stream protection. The forest and all the creatures that live there cannot survive without healthy salmon runs. Therefore all roadless areas and other old growth areas that remain should be protected from being deforested by logging.

The IRAs on the Tongass are critically important to help stabilize the ecology of the Tongass. They supply essential habitat and connectivity between all the areas which were once prime habitat that have been deforested by clearcut logging. Wildlife populations and salmon spawning streams in these roadless areas must be protected by leaving the existing old growth habitat intact. The cumulative effects of the Sealaska logging, decades of huge clearcuts on Forest Service lands, and the logging that is slated for the Alaska State Forest lands will be devastating to Tongass wildlife and salmon streams. The IRAs must remain protected as they now are by the current roadless rule if viable wildlife populations are to survive the effects of climate change. The proposed changes to the roadless rule are driven by the greed of private industry with no regard for the longterm welfare of the forests and salmon streams. The Forest Service's job is to protect the forest

now and for the future. The best way to do that is to keep the roadless rule intact as it now stands. I share this opinion with virtually all the public who attended the public meetings in Southeast Alaska.

Sincerely,

Eric Lee