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Comments:

To Whom It Concerns: I request that the Alaska Roadless rulemaking process fully incorporate the scientific findings of many years that demonstrate the deleterious effects of road construction in otherwise undeveloped portions of the Tongass N.Forest. Maintaining the so-called 77 Priority Watersheds in a roadless state is key to the long-term biodiversity and ecological integrity of the Tongass National Forest. These roadless watersheds were identified through a scientific (non-political) effort that determined that they are hugely important to the health of SE salmon populations. Obviously, they are of critical economic value to commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries.

Furthermore, as an avid wilderness recreationist in SE Alaska, I have personally kayaked along the coastline of several of these priority watershed areas: Eagle/Herbert River, Port Houghton Salt Chuck, Farragut Bay-South Arm, Mosman Inlet, Thoms lake, and Security Bay. My recreation dollars support air & ferry services, and retail, food & hotel businesses in smaller towns throughout SE. If you open these areas to road building and timber harvest, you will ruin the wilderness and undermine the economic values derived from recreation.

As a long-time natural resource manager in AK (now retired), I must also speak up about the stupidity of jeopardizing the broader economy of SE Alaska by reopening the roadless debate. Timber harvest contributes less than 1% of the overall SE economy, whereas fisheries, recreation, and tourism have large economic impacts in this region and depend on wilderness viewsheds and watersheds. Mining clearly has its place in the Tongass, and is accommodated under the present roadless system.

Finally, the Tongass is the largest, intact temperate rainforest on Earth. It provides a critical "respiratory function" by removing CO2 from the atmosphere and sequesters carbon in the trees. Clearcutting for short-term gain flies in the face of global efforts to rein in CO2 and minimize ever-worsening climate change impacts. Quite frankly, the trees have more value standing than being logged!

In sum, I oppose changes to the current roadless rule in place in the Tongass National Forest.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Keiser

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