

Date submitted (Alaskan Standard Time): 10/15/2018 1:48:15 PM

First name: Sommers

Last name: Cole

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 4024 Ridge Way

Address2:

City: Juneau

State: AK

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 99801

Country: United States

Email: sommers.j.cole@gmail.com

Phone: 907-942-4897

Comments:

I sincerely hope that our comments are taken seriously. I speculate that this rulemaking process has a foregone conclusion, indicated by the disturbingly rushed timeline and the composition of the Alaska Roadless Rule Citizen Advisory Committee. If this rulemaking process is not a sham, then both a no-action alternative and the possibility of increasing protections for roadless areas of the Tongass need to be considered as viable options. It is my strong-held opinion that increasing protections to these areas is the most economically, socially, and ecologically responsible option.

As a commercial gillnetter in Southeast Alaska, my access to harvest opportunity is based on the strength of wild salmon returns to index streams throughout the region. I am also in direct competition with other gillnetters and gear types for what is ultimately a fixed supply of salmon. If we degrade salmon habitat in southeast Alaska, it essentially decreases the size of the pie, compresses the fleet into remaining unaffected regions, devalues my permit, and decreases my earning potential. Although I directly harvest salmon returning to the Chilkat, Chilkoot, Katzehin, Endicott, Herbert/Eagle, Mendenhall, Taku, Slocum, Speel, Whiting, and countless smaller watersheds in Northern Southeast Alaska, I am impacted by the health of salmon bearing watersheds throughout the entirety of the Tongass, and most significantly by the quality of the habitat in the Tongass 77 and TNC/Audubon Conservation Priority Areas.

Prior to fishing commercially, I worked for several years in the tourism industry as a fly fishing guide, leading thousands of visitors on day trips to remote watersheds throughout Southeast Alaska. People come to Alaska precisely because we still have wilderness, intact ecosystems, and places without roads. Our home is generally a stark contrast from the places they are visiting from. Efforts to monetize every extractable resource as quickly as possible in the present have the likelihood of devaluing the "brand" that is Southeast Alaska in the future. In sport fish tourism, the value of the product extends into viewsapes and wildlife viewing opportunities, in addition to salmon stock health. This speaks nothing to the global decrease in supply and corresponding increase in value of undeveloped natural areas that are the driver of the Tongass tourism industry.

Tourism represents 11% of Southeast Alaska's economy. Commercial Fishing represents 10%. These are the largest private sector economic drivers in the region, and both are sustainable and depend on an intact Tongass. Please increase protections for all roadless areas in Southeast Alaska, or at the very least, take no action.

Sincerely,  
Sommers Cole