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Comments:

I was born and raised in Sitka, Alaska 26 years ago and was lucky enough to grow up in one of the most spectacularly beautiful and unique landscapes in the world. My parents would take us travelling throughout the world during the winter months, when the Tongass becomes dark, wet, and gray. Throughout my travels, I noticed that the natural spaces that we visited while vacationing - from Machu Picchu, Mt. Kilimanjaro, national parks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Madagascar, the Swiss Alps, Transylvania, and Ecuador - always seemed to be the exception to crowded, bustling cities that also characterized these countries. Not so in the Tongass, where we are fortunate that the natural beauty of the landscape permeates throughout the Forest and supports critical commercial fishing and tourism industries. We are so lucky to have an environment and economic milieu that pays to conserve these highly hospitable ecological landscapes, instead of one that requires their destruction (whether it be through logging, mining, or heavy tourism infrastructure). I left Sitka for six years to pursue an education in Scotland and sustainable development work in Madagascar, while being able to fund both of these opportunities through my work on a troll tender in South Chatham Strait during the summer for the past 5 years. After six years, however, I decided it was time for me to return home; the mountains, the freezing, clean ocean, the fish, the bears, the deer, the people - they were all calling me back.

After having experienced a highly patriarchal, 'democratic in name only' society in Madagascar that made social development initiatives burdensome and unduly difficult to pursue, I vowed that once I was back home, I would start participating in the public process and use the tools and opportunities that our democracy affords us. I believe that the most critical being the ability to have a voice in the public processes that will affect the future of the land that I love and call home. I also believe that using my own voice is not enough; I want to use my education, my motivation, to help others voice their thoughts and opinions, to make sense of this arcane method of participation, to believe that they, too, can make a difference.

With that being said, I believe that the 2001 Roadless Rule provides critical protections to the fish and wildlife habitat that sustain my livelihood, my passion, my subsistence harvesting and ability to afford to live in Sitka, as well as the economic viability of my community at large. In Sitka, we depend on these healthy landscapes for our commercial fishing and tourism industries. As such, I recommend that any Alaska roadless rule specifically include the T77 top salmon-producing watersheds and the TNC/Audobon conservation priority areas as inventoried roadless areas, whether or not they are currently regarded as such under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Act. I also support the inclusion of all inventoried roadless areas under the new Alaska Roadless rule.

I would like to see some flexibility in regards to critical community infrastructure projects. Hydropower, airports, land for affordable housing - the Forest Service should approach these community development projects with the goal of balancing development actions and ecological characteristics of the surrounding land. However, large-scale old growth timber harvest should not be a part of this conversation, as the ecological, social, and economic impacts would be too high and adversely affect the resiliency of the communities that rely on these natural surroundings for everything from food to power to supporting their small businesses. I would like to see most inventoried roadless areas, but in particular the T77 watersheds/TNC ecological priority areas, be managed primarily for remote and semi-remote recreation purposes (and approve of the construction of public use cabins, mooring buoys, and hiking trails that make outdoor recreation easier to access and act as an experience enhancer. Large scale, old growth timber harvest does not belong on the Tongass anymore, and I would like the Forest Service to address the actual economic impact of the timber industry with a cost-benefit analysis of roadbuilding costs (environmental, social, economic) and the impact of the timber industry on the Southeast economy.

I support the transition to young growth harvest as managed by the 2016 Tongass Land Management plan, and urge the Forest Service to continue adhering to this forest plan, which was produced with an unprecedented amount of cooperation between historically divided and inimical interests. I do not believe that the State of Alaska is fairly representing its constituents in Southeast, who have by and large voiced vociferous opposition to this attempt to divide up the Tongass and open it to a deleterious economic activity that benefits the few at the expense of the many. I urge the Forest Service to consider that fact when they are weighing the input of the State against the public comments submitted.

I would like the Forest Service to explore the options to participate in carbon sequestration markets, as well as analyze in detail the carbon carrying capacity of the Tongass. As climate change causes increasingly erratic weather and rainfall patterns, we are lucky to have the Tongass as a bulwark against many of the worse effects of this climactic change. The Forest Service should be exploring ways to earn revenue from keeping the forest intact, which is a significantly more valuable endeavor (both now and in the future) than timber harvesting.

I would like to see a watershed restoration program on the Tongass before any trees are cut. The Forest Service should endeavor to catalogue the condition of the forest now in comparison to how it looked just 100 years ago, and take the opportunity to restore degraded watersheds that resulted from the heavy logging during the pulp mill days. Communities are still suffering from the effects that this logging had on their subsistence resources including deer and salmon populations.

I urge the Forest Service to look towards the future: what are the economic sectors that are growing? What do these sectors depend on for continued viability? How can we ease burdensome regulation on hydropower development, while maintaining a commitment to the ecological characteristics of the lands that these power projects are on? I want to see a sustainable future for the Tongass, characterized by: Alaskan stewardship and the workforce development necessary to stimulate this activity; carbon sequestration and incoming revenue as a result; healthy fish and wildlife populations for our food security and local businesses; and an engaged populace that works to conserve and sustainably develop the immense natural wealth we already have. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments.