

Date submitted (Alaskan Standard Time): 10/15/2018 8:56:45 PM

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Comments:

Dear Forest Service,

All inventoried roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest should continue to be protected under the new Alaska Roadless Rule. I support keeping the 2001 Roadless Rule restrictions in place on the Tongass. In addition, I support tightening restrictions for the Tongass 77 priority watershed areas to prevent any development activities (such as mining) that would cause significant damage to these critical ecosystems. Rather than loosening protections of our invaluable remaining old growth forests, I believe the Forest Service, the Federal Government at large, and the State of Alaska should focus on improving the administration of the various permitting processes that support development activities that are already allowed on the Tongass, such as community approved hydro-projects.

I am a born and raised Sitkan, and I am grateful to be a guest in the ancestral and un-ceded territory of the Tlingit people. The Tongass is critical to the way of life for this community, socially, ecologically and economically. My household income is dependent on healthy salmon runs. We stock our freezers with subsistence foods and spend our free time hiking, kayaking, camping and generally enjoying the forest. It's beautiful and wild and rare.

I want intact ecosystems on the Tongass to exist for generations to come, and to not be broken up by projects that send money elsewhere and leave Alaskans to clean up the mess. I don't want federal or state dollars spent on new roads that we can't afford to build or maintain. In addition to all of this, the Tongass is a globally significant carbon sink. As we face catastrophic climate change, we should do everything possible to preserve the few old growth forests left in the world both for their intrinsic value and to maximize carbon sequestration.

I would like the Forest Service to focus their energy on:

Restoration of watersheds damaged by clear cut logging

Appropriate thinning of second growth forests

Improvement of the special use permitting process for the Tongass for sustainable non-commercial and commercial purposes

Investment in workforce development for all of the activities on this list

Participation in carbon-credit markets

Research on the economic value of the non-timber outputs of the Tongass from salmon to carbon sequestration to tourism

Facilitation of responsible development as already allowed under the 2001 roadless rule (i.e. well-designed & community supported hydroelectric and transmission line construction)

Provision of longer-term, smaller-scale timber sales to small timber operators that can operate more sustainably without government subsidies or significant negative environmental impacts.

I would also be happy to see the Forest Service focus on second growth timber sales. For old growth timber sales, I believe that the Forest Service should provide a public report on the cost of extraction (including subsidies) versus the value of the final sale.

A final note - I'm concerned about the process that is being followed to create options for the Alaska specific roadless rule. The short timeline for this round of public comments will leave out many important voices from our communities. In addition, it's my understanding that the timeline allowed for the government to government process with tribes was unrealistic. This makes me concerned that this will not be an equitable process, which is unacceptable for a policy decision of this magnitude.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Chandler O'Connell