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Comments:

Dear Forest Service,

I am submitting my comments on the Forest Service's Draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest (NF) in Alaska.

While the 6.9 million-acre Chugach National Forest doesn't yet contain any designated Wilderness, it does hold the spectacular, Congressionally-designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA. This wilderness study area is an ecological and scenic treasure. It contains nearly two million acres of ancient rainforest, wild salmon, and stunning mountains and glaciers. It is an area of meandering fiords interlaced with hundreds of remote islands. This place, as designated by Congress, deserves the greatest protection possible.

The Draft LRMP for the Chugach National Forest must include the following improvements:

1. Firstly, this Plan must protect the "wilderness character" of the WSA. The Forest Service's weak proposal to protect just its "existing character" is insufficient to maintain this area as designated. Additionally, this Plan must protect the wilderness character of the lands in the WSA by classifying all of them with the Forest Service's "Primitive" standard, which is the most protective standard in the agency's recreational classification system.
2. This Plan must restore the strong protection to the lands within the WSA that the federal government purchased following the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. These lands were acquired for the main purpose of restoring wilderness values and must be managed "in perpetuity for conservation and wilderness purposes," as promised when they were purchased by the federal government.
3. The Chugach NF must address the continued illegal recreational use of chainsaws in the WSA, which has resulted in damaging tree removal along dozens of wilderness beaches, especially in sensitive areas. Protection must be fully supported by law enforcement. It's unbelievable that there is such disrespect for this phenomenal land; its scenic views, diverse wildlife, and its 'untouched wilderness' character.
4. Alternative D recommends the maximum amount of land for Wilderness of any of the Alternatives (97 percent of the WSA, or 1.884 million acres). I support a modified Alternative D wilderness recommendation that also includes Lake Nellie Juan and the lands within the WSA boundary that were purchased for restoration of wilderness resources following the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill.

Alaska really is the Final Frontier and if we want it to maintain this character, we must make sure that the Chugach NF and the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area contained within it are given the protection they need and deserve so that future generations can enjoy this place, too. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Chugach NF Land and Resource Management Plan.

Sincerely,

LeeAnn Bennett, former Alaskan