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First name: Patti

Last name: Saunders

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 3733 Henderson Loop

Address2:

City: Anchorage

State:

Province/Region: AK

Zip/Postal Code: 99507

Country: United States

Email: saunders.patti@gmail.com

Phone: 9072782802

Comments:

I was a commercial fisherman in Prince William Sound for five years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. I have been a recreational user of the sound since 1986. I served as a volunteer on the PWS RCAC Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee in the early 1990s. Prince William Sound is a very special place and deserves all the protection we can give it. It has still not entirely recovered from the 1989 spill so this document should incorporate protections that give it a chance to recover fully. Freedom from logging is especially important for those seabirds who nest in old growth trees who were almost wiped out during the spill and its aftermath. Yellow billed loons are also deserving of our best efforts to preserve their habitat.

I have read and concur with the comments submitted to you by PWS Stewardship Foundation. I will not repeat them all here, but please treat this as my intent. Here is a short summary of them:

The draft Plan changes "maintain presently existing wilderness character" (the language in the 1984 and 2002 forest plans) to "maintain presently existing character." Omitting the word "wilderness" would create confusion and undermine management to preserve the area's wilderness character.

The draft Plan omits the program to monitor conditions in the Wilderness Study Area (conditions such as air quality, recreation impacts, visitor numbers, etc.). Monitoring is vital to responsible management. Every summer chainsaw vandalism adversely affects the scenic quality of Prince William Sound beaches. A forest Order is necessary to resolve confusion about the legality of using chainsaws for non-subsistence recreational purposes in the area.

The Plan should more clearly acknowledge that the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council still lists the Wilderness Study Area as an injured resource. Also, Wilderness Study Area management should include restoring and maintaining the wilderness qualities damaged by the spill, as described in the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Plan.

The lands around Jackpot Bay, Paddy Bay, and Knight Island acquired following the Exxon Valdez oil spill should be included in the Wilderness Study Area Management Area (MA1). The intent of the 1997 federal purchase of these lands was to restore and maintain their wilderness qualities. Including them in the MA6 area would weaken their protection and go against the intent of the 1997 purchase.

Of the draft Plan's proposed alternatives, choose Alternative D Wilderness Recommendation, but with the addition of the Nellie Juan Lake area-one of the most wild and remote places in the Chugach Forest-and USFS land on Elrington Island, and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill-acquired lands around Jackpot Bay, Paddy Bay, Hogan Bay, and Junction Island. With these additions, the Alternative D Wilderness Recommendation would uphold the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill purchase agreements and best support a healthy ecosystem and the human interests of this area.