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The stated purpose of the POW LLA project is to improve forest ecosystem health, help support community resilience, as well as provide economic development to the area. What the project does instead is allow for the sale of 235 million board feet of old-growth forest on Prince of Wales to timber operators over the next fifteen years. This complex of islands has already experienced six decades of high-volume old-growth clearcutting.

It is estimated that 94% of the contiguous high-volume forests were clear-cut for timber between 1954 and 2004. Prince of Wales and its surrounding islands host numerous endemic plants and animals, found nowhere else on earth, which rely on large-tree old-growth habitat for sheltering, foraging, and breeding. Clearcutting neither improves the health of this ecosystem nor provides sustainable economic development.

Old-growth clearcutting in Southeast Alaska is horrifyingly short-sighted, like chopping down an orchard to build a bonfire. Old-growth forests on Prince of Wales Island support birds, deer, wolves, and salmon. This rich ecosystem gives rise to three of the region's major economic drivers-tourism, fishing, and recreation. Clearcutting here poses the risk for economic harm, especially in the long run. Southeast Alaska already supports a healthy tourism industry reliant on wildlife and intact habitats. Plus, there is plenty of room for sustainable growth. Birding and wildlife viewing are among America's most popular hobbies. Audubon Alaska's forthcoming Southeast Alaska Birding Trail is an example of sustainable projects that can foster ecotourism in small communities throughout the Tongass National Forest, including Prince of Wales Island.

It is disappointing to see the agency entrenched in a clearcutting mindset even as it struggles to appreciate the economic opportunities that come from conserving, rather than chopping down, old-growth forest. Hopefully, the Forest Service will reconsider moving ahead with this project as proposed and instead will design a program that focuses on an eco-sensitive economic development plan incorporating eco-tourism, rather than destroying this extremely beautiful and important forest