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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Respectfully,

These comments are in regards to proposed changes to the Roadless Rule for the Tongass National Forest (the "Preferred Alternative", Alternative 6). I strongly disapprove of these plans and the preferred alternative, and any plans to increase the development of roads and business operations (in particular timber and extractive industries) on National Forests in Alaska. Instead, I urge the USDA and USFS to, at minimum, maintain the size of fully protected forest lands in Alaska and ideally to designate further lands as Wilderness and/or off-limits to the development of roads, harvesting of trees or other business purposes. I will outline several reasons for my position below.

First, these forests represent a large share of our national ecological heritage. We have already given over the vast majority of productive land (whether forested or prairie) to agriculture, timber harvesting, development and private ownership. Starting with Teddy Roosevelt and continued by almost every subsequent administration, we have recognized the intrinsic value of large natural, wild spaces with designation of National Parks, Forest, Wilderness Areas and other types of public land. In my job, I take young adults on wilderness expeditions in the Western US and Alaska. I can attest firsthand that the Tongass NF is an excellent location for people to witness the splendor, wonder and inspirational character of the wilderness. They also develop habits of character and leadership that are foundational to this country.

Second, the maintenance of healthy forest ecosystems is critical for the fisheries of the Pacific Northwest. Destruction of forest habitat will reduce the quantity and quality of fish available for commercial and recreational fishermen. It will similarly reduce hunting opportunities both in the forest and adjacent lands.

Third, trees help reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere--levels that are higher now than at any point in the past 800,000 years (<https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>). Anyone remotely familiar with Alaska can attest to the rapid retreat of glaciers around the state (both in length and thickness) and to the increasingly erratic and unseasonable weather. As a mountain climber, I can attest that many traditional mountain climbing routes are no longer viable or acceptable due to unstable glacial activity as mean temperatures climb. For all these reasons, we should be protecting the trees we have and planting more, not increasing access to logging on public land.

Fourth, there are numerous endangered species that live in the Tongass NF including the Black Oystercatcher and Spotted Owl. Many different species across a range of different biological phyla require large areas of wild land in order to remain viable. Loss of biodiversity across the planet is already occurring at an unsustainable rate. In the long- and perhaps even medium-term, humans cannot survive without a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem. Public lands in general, and wilderness areas in particular, are critical to maintaining what animal and plant life we still have left.

Any argument about the value of these lands as sources of government revenue are, on their face, hypocritical and misplaced. Given that the tax relief bill of 2018 includes such giveaways as a 100% tax credit for the purchase of private jets, no one can argue that the federal government needs to sell trees to fund itself.

Thank you for considering these comments.

[Position]

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