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Comments:

I don't live in Alaska. I have not been fortunate enough to have even visited Alaska yet. But I hope to someday visit and to fish for the legendary runs of salmonids that have brought the ocean's nutrients into forests around the Pacific rim, including the mighty Tongass. I hope to experience what America's last frontier has to offer in terms of richness, diversity and solitude. I hope that the Tongass will be intact waiting for me when I get there. I'm writing this comment to express my feeling that the Forest Service should rescale this project. Just opening up the entire Tongass National Forest to road building and logging activities is a huge reversal to the kind of protection it has enjoyed; protection that is for good reason. America's temperate rainforest captures carbon. We simply cannot afford to cut down a forest that plays such an important role in the health and viability of the planet. On top of carbon sequestration, the Tongass supports healthy salmonid habitat that should not be exposed to sediment runoff and other mechanisms of stream degradation associated with roads and logging activities.

Tourism is also important. Do people who paid to see the wilds of Alaska want to see clear cuts? Do people who book hunting/fishing/wilderness trips to southeast Alaska want to see patches of stumps and locked gates? The intact forest is an economic driver just like timber that comes out of it.

As much as I would love to see even stronger protections such as wilderness area protections, I understand the need for jobs in the area. But the land is more than just dollars and has implications far beyond Alaska. I think there is a balance that can be struck with a smaller scale opening of younger growth areas instead of the wholesale approach that the Forest Service seems to prefer. For instance, perhaps instead of clear cutting and logging old growth, an acceptable compromise would be selective thinning. Projects like recreational site enhancements, stream restoration and general forest health management should be allowed but as I have already said, I think the wholesale opening of the Tongass to road building activities and clear cut logging is a monumental mistake that we cannot afford as inhabitants of planet Earth.

On top of the environmental, commercial, social and societal considerations, the Forest Service must take into account what exemption for Alaska from the roadless rule implies for the rest of the forest lands currently protected by the rule. It says that if corporate interest pressures local politicians enough and then those politicians complain loud enough, the Forest Service will roll over and bow to pressure, allowing for resource exploitation and major landscape changes.