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Last name: Handler

Organization:

Title:

Comments:

My name is Eleanor Handler and I live in Sitka, AK. I've lived in Southeast for over a year now. I moved here for the Tongass and have come to depend on the forest. I harvest wild berries and mushrooms, catch salmon, and eat venison that friends and neighbors hunt on the Tongass. This lifestyle is why I live in Southeast Alaska, it's why I left the lower 48 and why so many people come visit these lands. I recreate on the Tongass as well seeking vistas and peace that I find in the old-growth forests. I am writing a comment on the Alaska Roadless Rule DEIS because I am concerned with how changes the Rule and the proposed full exemption will impact my fishing, subsistence harvesting, foraging for wild foods, the peace and solitude I find in nature while recreating, the forest's ability to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change impacts, and the ability of future generations to enjoy the areas I have come to love.

Out of the alternatives described in the AKRR DEIS I support alternative 1: no action. The rule is working fine as it is by balancing the conservation of our fish and wildlife habitat with important development projects. Out of 56 proposed projects in Roadless Areas on the Tongass, all have been approved. The exemptions we need are already established within the national rule. I depend on roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest for healthy fish habitat, deer habitat and subsistence hunting, foraging and gathering wild foods, recreating and enjoying nature, carbon sequestration and local climate change mitigation, fiscal responsibility and saving taxpayer dollars, and to keep public lands wild for future generations. A full exemption does not protect these priorities, nor does it effectively balance economic development and the conservation of roadless area characteristics. A full exemption from the Roadless Rule and increased logging and roadbuilding will negatively impact the Tongass and what I and many others use and depend on the forest to provide for us.

The Roadless areas on the Tongass that are especially important to me are those on or around Baranof Island where I live, recreate, fish, and subsistence harvest, all of the inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass. I want the roadless areas in these locations to stay in roadless status in any alternative selected by the Forest Service, and be managed to provide for the uses and activities I listed above. It is important to me that the T77 and the TNC conservation priority areas retain their roadless protections. Furthermore, it is important to me that the high-value salmon producing watersheds on Prince of Wales that were not included in the T77 because of earlier impacts retain protections as well.

I do not support the Forest Services preferred alternative of a full exemption. A full exemption is not in the interests of Southeast Alaskans who live in and use the Tongass National Forest, because it ignores the countless Southeast Alaskans who have spoken up to keep the Roadless Rule on the Tongass. Our economy is based on fishing and tourism, both of which benefit from the Roadless Rule. A full exemption would demonstrate that our political leaders are in the pockets of corporate interests and are not listening to their constituents. The State of Alaska says that a full exemption is needed for rural economic development opportunities. However, a full exemption would not help create more rural economic development opportunities, it would instead harm our existing rural economies that are based on the visitor industry and commercial fishing industry.

It would further harm rural economic opportunities because pursuing the same outdated economic model of old growth clearcut harvesting for export stifles innovation and possibility in other sectors. I am excited to see increases in mariculture, sustainable young growth harvest, and rural agriculture in Southeast Alaska's future. These are the directions we need to turn, not towards the past and old-growth clear cutting. If the Forest Service wants to support rural economic development, they should devote resources to support our fishing and visitor industries transition to second growth logging.

Southeast Alaska is unique because of its incredible landscape and the lifestyle it supports. We live here because of this, not because it's easy but because it is important. Please support the future of Southeast Alaska and the unique lifestyle we have here by selecting the No Action alternative.

I urge the Forest Service to prioritize the voices of Southeast Alaskans over those of our political representation and corporate interests. Choosing a full exemption will not create a long lasting, durable solution for roadless areas on the Tongass. It will only increase the legal challenges, uncertainty for businesses, and conflict on the Tongass going forward.

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