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Comments:

As a thirty-two year resident of Southeast Alaska, with the past twenty five years lived in Craig, Alaska, I know how special the Tongass National Forest is. Our family has spent countless hours in the Forest - appreciating the views; enjoying the remoteness; harvesting deer, fish, berries, and free-use wood for our family's livelihood; breathing in the fresh air; and exercising in the great outdoors to maintain healthy body and spirit. We arrived here when logging was at the top of the economic base. We've seen the downward spiral, and resulting loss in population, since the roadless rule went into effect - which has led to less educational program offerings in our schools, and less diversity in our local retail offerings. In the past few years, as President of the Prince of Wales Chamber of Commerce, and an active team member of POWLAT, I have learned a lot about the Tongass National Forest and how the USFS conducts its planning. I have seen a lot of compromise from local environmental groups and from the timber industry participants. I think it IS possible for our very large Forest area to support continued logging and small timber (music wood) sales, and still protect vast areas as wilderness and roadless areas. I think the planning ahead for young growth logging is on the right track. I think preserving some old growth for eternity is also important. I appreciate that the Forest Service requires local processing of the wood products so that the timber is not exported in the round - keeping the jobs here. I would like to see our local Forest Service and community agencies be responsible for our Forest through the design of an Alaska-specific, or maybe even just a Tongass or Southeast Alaska-specific roadless rule. We should not have our hands tied by the greater national interests to preserve 90% of the Tongass, when other areas nationwide have much smaller percentage of areas set-aside. I have faith in our local agencies to continue managing for the diverse needs of our communities. Please remove the Tongass from the National Roadless Rule and allow for more local decision making.