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Mr. Don Hernandez
Chairman
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Rd., MS 121
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199

Dear Mr. Hernandez:

Thank you for your March 5, 2019 letter offering comments on the Alaska roadless rulemaking effort. I appreciate the time you took to express your concerns, and I assure you that your comments will be carefully considered as the Roadless Rulemaking Team continues its work on the analysis for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the development of the Proposed Alaska Roadless Rule.

I acknowledge your concerns about the timing of the comment period for the DEIS and the public meetings and subsistence hearings that will be held during that time. I recognize that rural subsistence users are often engaged in work and subsistence activities in the summer months and am committed to doing all I can to ensure that they have the opportunity to be informed about and submit comments on the proposed rule. At this time, we expect to release the DEIS and proposed rule and begin the 60-day comment period in summer 2019. The Rulemaking Team will be scheduling meetings in various locations throughout the Tongass National Forest as soon as they have a firmer date for the release of the DEIS and will notify the Council, communities, and Tribes immediately after these meetings are scheduled in the hopes that this early notification will allow for participation by interested individuals and entities. I will also be extending an offer for consultation to all Southeast Alaska Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations in advance of the release of the DEIS, although consultation is ongoing and available at any time upon request, as are roadless presentations/information sharing to communities and other entities. I am committed to continuous and meaningful engagements and consultations with Tribal governments throughout this process.

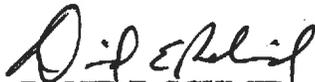
I would like to specifically address two concerns raised in your March 5, 2019 letter. First, you indicated that Alaska Tribes and communities should be involved in the identification of tribal and clan territories in inventoried roadless areas. On July 30, 2018, all Alaska Tribes in Southeast Alaska were extended the offer to become a cooperating agency in the Alaska roadless rulemaking process; six tribes accepted this offer, each signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Forest Service and being actively involved in the review of the preliminary DEIS and proposed rule. Suggestions and dialogue about accurate traditional territories were offered by more than one tribal entity during this process, and the Rulemaking Team is working through the review process with those considerations in mind.



Second, I would like to address your concerns regarding the State of Alaska's Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC). The August 2, 2018 MOU between the State of Alaska and the Forest Service outlines how the State and the Forest Service intended to work together during this rulemaking process. As indicated in that MOU, the State of Alaska formed the CAC to inform their input to the Forest Service. This CAC was established via an administrative order issued by then-Governor Bill Walker, and the process to convene and manage the CAC was solely at the discretion of the State of Alaska. Any specific comments or questions regarding the State's CAC should be directed to Chris Maisch, Alaska State Forester, at Chris.Maisch@alaska.gov or (907) 451-2660.

Again, I would like to thank you for your thoughtful comments on the Alaska roadless rulemaking and analysis process. I will update you with information on the timing and locations for the public meetings and subsistence hearings that will be scheduled later this summer. I look forward to continued dialogue as we all work together to develop an Alaska roadless rule that responds to the needs of all Southeast Alaska residents.

Sincerely,


DAVID E. SCHMID
Regional Forester

cc: Chad VanOrmer