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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

I am writing to express my opposition to the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to open 9.2 million roadless acres of the Tongass National Forest to development. The Forest Service presents 6 options ranging from no change in the current status of the Tongass Forest (Option 1) to Option 6 which would open the largest amount of land to development. The Forest Service names Option 6 as their preferred alternative. This option would exempt the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule and open to development more than half of the Tongass-leaving only a third of the forest as undeveloped wilderness. The short time available for public comment allows insufficient time for thoughtful, rational discussion of the 6 options that the Forest Service has presented. However, options 1-5 (and especially Option 1) would seem to be more in line with local public sentiment, as evidenced by opinions expressed in recent public town hall-type meetings.

I am an environmental scientist and ecologist with 15 years of experience living in and studying southeast Alaska ecosystems, and I oppose Option 6 for the following ecologic and economic reasons.

1. The Tongass is part of the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world, stretching from Alaska to northern California in a narrow band along the North Pacific coast. Old-growth forests within this unique ecosystem type are globally endangered by logging and other development, as well as by climate change.
2. Old-growth temperate rainforests store large amounts amount of carbon, with the Tongass accounting for 8% of all carbon stored in the U.S. National Forests. Increased disturbance through logging, road building, and other development activities will affect carbon sequestration and flux through this ecosystem, with impacts to global carbon budgets.
3. Coastal watersheds within the Tongass export large amounts of fresh water and nutrients such as carbon, nitrogen, iron, and phosphorus to the North Pacific Ocean, fueling productive marine food webs and globally-important fisheries. Increased disturbance to these watersheds will impact this nutrient exchange from the land to the sea.
4. The Tongass provides freshwater spawning and rearing habitats that support large wild salmon populations, and a new study estimates that harvests of these wild salmon have an annual dockside value of \$68 million. Increased road building, culvert installation, and logging will negatively affect these habitats, changing hydrology, water temperature, nutrient export, aquatic food webs, and silt loads. Wild salmon populations will decline with increased development in the Tongass, affecting fisheries and fishery-dependent industries.
5. Increased access through road building within the Tongass will lead to habitat fragmentation for many species, and increased hunting and trapping pressure for many game animals may drive local populations to extinction. This is especially troublesome given the presence of unique lineages of birds and mammals on many of the islands within the Forest, some with small and isolated populations.
6. Tourism in Southeast Alaska is on the rise, with up to 1.4 million visitors expected in 2020. Tourists, many of whom arrive on cruise ships, come to Alaska to experience pristine wilderness, see wildlife, and enjoy fresh seafood. Further development in the Tongass that negatively impacts these values will have deleterious effects on this growing industry.
7. Under current law, exemptions to the Roadless Rule can be made for individual development projects, like rare earth mineral mines. Thoughtful development, made in consultation with local communities, stakeholders, and citizens, can and should continue in the Tongass. Exempting the Tongass from the Roadless Rule is not necessary.

8. Lastly, the Tongass is culturally essential to the Tlingit and Haida people, who have lived in southeast Alaska for thousands of years. Because the Tongass Forest accounts for 80% of the land in this region, the U.S. Federal Government has a responsibility to these people to consult them in their proposal to open the Tongass Forest to development. They have not done so.

In light of all these points, I strongly oppose Option 6 and request that the Forest Service seriously consider both the best available science and the opinions of the people that actually live in Southeast Alaska and call it their home.

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