
Summary of Public Comments on the Proposed Exemption and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Introduction/Overview

In August 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiated an environmental impact statement (EIS) and public rulemaking process to address the management of inventoried roadless areas within Alaska. This rulemaking is the result of a petition submitted by Governor Bill Walker's administration in January 2018 on behalf of Alaska, pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act. The petition was accepted by the Secretary of Agriculture in April 2018. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed change to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (hereafter the 2001 Roadless Rule) for Alaska evaluated the regulatory exemption set forth in the petition and the impacts of potential alternatives on the environment. The DEIS was released on October 17, 2019, which was followed by a public comment period.

This report provides a summary of public comments received on the proposed rulemaking for Alaska roadless areas and the associated DEIS. The 60-day public comment period following the October 17, 2019 publication of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Request for Comment in the *Federal Register* (84 FR 55522) ended on December 17, 2019. This report captures concern themes identified following the review and assessment of public comments. This report is not intended to be exhaustive of all written comments. Please refer to the original written comments located on the project web page (https://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=54511) for additional written comment details.

The overall objectives of this report are to:

- Aggregate and summarize public comment themes
- Identify input for developing the final rule and final environmental impact statement (FEIS)
- Identify other public concerns relevant to Alaska-Specific Roadless Rulemaking

Methodology

The methodology used for identifying unique concern themes followed this stepwise procedure:

1. All written public comments submitted by mail, email, and through the Comment Analysis and Response Application (CARA) were read in their entirety
2. All written comments were coded based on specific topics that were used to group similar comments.
3. The term [Position] was appended to each letter designated to be coded (unique, master form, and form+). The position statement was coded to the explicit stated action preference in the letter. The code options for preferred action included Support for Alternative 1, Support for Alternative 6, Support for Rule Change, and Not Stated. These position terms were used to generate percent estimate of commenters in favor of a particular action.
4. All subgroups of written comments were reviewed to identify unique concerns, which were summarized as concern statements
5. All subgroups of written comments were categorized by the most appropriate concern statement



6. Quality review of the coding, position, and concern statements were conducted.

Summary

During the 60-day public comment period following the October 17, 2019 publication of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Request for Comment in the *Federal Register* (84 FR 55522) there were a total of 248,520 entries logged by CARA. In the DEIS Comment Period and NOA2 Form Letter folders there were 58,759 and 189,761 total entries, respectively. Several organizations submitted letters that included multiple unique and form letters from different commenters. These submissions increased the total entry count to 325,266 (Table 1). Eleven letters had attached petitions (117,364 signatures; Table 2). Several organizations and institutions submitted a single letter with multiple signatures (Table 3). The total entry count described by letter type follows.

A) DEIS Comment Period Folder:

- 6,978 Unique Letters
- 5,651 Duplicate Letters
- 46,130 Form Letters
 - Master Forms: 80
 - Forms: 40,274
 - Form Plus: 5,776

B) NOA2 Form Letters Folder:

- 52,340 Duplicate Letters
- 137,421 Form Letters
 - Master Forms: 41
 - Forms: 134,346
 - Form Plus: 3,034

C) Organization Submissions:

- 2,615 Unique Letters
- 12,221 Form Plus Letters
- 61,910 Forms Letters
- 76,746 Total

Between the DEIS and NOA2 folders within CARA a total of 15,909 letters had a letter type designated to be coded (unique, master form, and form+). Of these 15,908 received the [Position] term and preferred action code. These results show that approximately 96% of all commenters prefer keeping the existing 2001 Roadless Rule protections in place, approximately 1% are in favor of exemption, approximately 2% did not explicitly state a position, and less than approximately 1% requested a rule change other than exemption (Table 4).



Table 1. Number of Letters with Multiple Comments per Submission

CARA Letter ID	Organization	Unique Letters	Total Form Letters	Total Form Plus
37971	Alaska Wilderness League	0	0	2,821
41319	Alaska Rainforest Defenders	1	0	0
42010	Audubon Alaska	12	0	0
41186	Audubon Alaska	39	0	0
41139	Earthjustice	1	0	0
37433	Friends of the Earth	0	29,615	96
38800	Greenpeace	19	0	9,127
41814	National Audubon Society	3	0	177
37931	Natural Resources Defense Council	0	32,284	2,510
41883	Southeast Alaska Conservation Council	20	0	0
42028	Sitka Conservation Society	0	11	0
41271	Community members in Sitka and Pelican, Alaska	10	0	0

Table 2. Letters Including Petitions

CARA Letter ID	Organization	Number of Signatures	Petition's Preferred Alternative*
36961	Click Cause	11	1
37971	AK Wilderness League	5,232	1
38800	Greenpeace	96,247	1
41270	Southeast Alaskan Fishermen and Women	254	1
41814	National Audubon Society	1,156	1
42002	Defenders of Wildlife	14,306	1
63414	Click Cause	24	1
63437	Click Cause	37	1
63438	Click Cause	62	1
63439	Click Cause	24	1
63440	Click Cause	11	1

* Note: 1 = Support for Alternative 1

DRAFT



Table 3. Subset of Letters Received with Multiple Signatures

CARA Letter ID	Organization	Number of Signatures
487	Angoon Cooperative Association	6
7892	Milner, Howard, Palmer & Edwards CPAs	4
37911	The Conservation Alliance	39
37924	Seafood Producers Cooperative	3
41167	Washington Wild	39
41192	Washington Elected Officials	102
41269	The Wilderness Society	94
41278	Alaska Wilderness League	10
41818	Trout Unlimited	79
42029	United States Senators	15
42139	InterTribal Sinkiyone Wilderness Council	10
51032	Timberworks	5
63441	The Alaska Roadless Rule Coalition	21

Table 4. Breakdown of Preferred Action Stated by Commenters

Position	DEIS	NOA2	Total	Percent
Keep Existing Rule	12,252	3,069	15,321	96
Exempt Alaska	226	5	231	1
Change Existing Rule	78	0	78	< 1
Position Not Stated	278	0	278	2
Total	12,834	3074	15,908	



Section 1 - NEPA and Procedural Concerns

Concerns related to procedure and the public comment process in general were received. Systemic issues and specific problems associated with the proposed rulemaking process were noted and are generally captured below.

Scoping

Commenters expressed concern with the scoping process. Themes identified include concerns with the scoping timing, disclosure related to administrative changes, and lack of response to public comments received during scoping comment period. A more detailed description by concern theme follows.

Theme 1 – Scoping Timing

Commenters expressed concern that public scoping occurred after the public rulemaking process had begun, which is considered to be the result of biased decision-making in favor of industry and political influence.

Theme 2 – Disclosures Related to Administrative Changes

Commenters were concerned that administrative changes included in the proposed rulemaking were not raised during the notice of intent, scoping, and public hearings. Commenters stated concerns that the addition of administrative changes to the proposed rulemaking exceeded the scope and EIS. Commenters made specific concerns on the impact to the Tongass Land Management Plan and the Chugach National Forest. Commenters submitted requests for an EIS related to the proposed administrative changes for the Chugach National Forest.

Theme 3 – Response to Scoping Public Comments

Commenters expressed concern that the U.S. Forest Service did not address comments received during the scoping comment period. Specific concerns not addressed from the scoping public comment period include requests for economic analysis and the use of best available information and science.

Public Involvement

Individuals, cooperating agencies, non-governmental organizations, government officials, and business groups submitted concerns with the public involvement process. Concern themes included issues with timing, inclusion of cooperating agency concerns, inclusion of public concerns, ignored public hearing requests, and insufficient coverage of public hearings. A more detailed description by concern theme follows.

Theme 1 – Timing

Commenters expressed concern that insufficient time was available for an in-depth review of the NEPA-related documentation, including the DEIS and related analyses. Further, cooperating agencies raised concern they were not provided enough time to conduct environmental impact analyses for their communities.

Theme 2 – Inclusion of Cooperating Agencies' Considerations

Cooperating agencies expressed concern that their considerations and best interests were not incorporated into the decision-making process. Commenters expressed concerns that the preferred Alternative 6 was selected unilaterally. Cooperating agencies maintain the legally required tribal consultation was inadequate and in violation



of the Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service signed in accordance with 40 CFR Section 1501.6 and 1508.5. Additionally, the best available information, including the community use and territory maps provided by the cooperating agencies, were not used in the DEIS and associated analyses.

Theme 3 – Inclusion of Publics’ Concerns

Commenters expressed concern that the public participation process was inadequate because the majority of public concerns escalated to the agency have not been incorporated into the decision-making process. A substantial majority of public comments were in favor of Alternative 1 for wide-ranging and numerous reasons; however, the agency selected Alternative 6 despite the overwhelming support for keeping the rule intact. By ignoring the public considerations brought forth, the agency is undermining public trust and making decisions not representative of the public’s welfare.

Theme 4 – Inclusion of the Advisory Committee’s Recommendations

Commenters expressed general and specific concern that the Citizen Advisory Committee recommendations were not considered or reflected in the DEIS. Commenters respected the diverse, cross-sector stakeholder perspectives the committee brought to the decision-making process and considered the recommendations a durable solution for the region. Commenters expressed concern regarding the significant commitment and resources invested in relation to the lack of inclusion of committees’ recommendations. Committee members agreed on mandatory authorizations and land use exceptions to be included in all the action alternatives. Commenters expressed concern that these considerations were excluded from the DEIS.

Theme 5 – Ignored Informational and Public Hearing Requests

Commenters expressed concern that requests for public hearings were ignored. These requests came from commenters within regions that will be socioeconomically impacted by the proposed rulemaking process.

Theme 6 – Insufficient Coverage of Public Hearings

Commenters expressed concern that public hearings were not held for communities socioeconomically impacted by the proposed rule. Specific communities near Chugach National Forest in Alaska and Washington were provided.

Purpose and Need

Commenters expressed various concerns with the Purpose and Need statement. Themes identified included concerns related to amendments, adequacy of rationale, administrative changes, and alignment with alternative selection. A more detailed description for each theme follows.

Theme 1 – Amendments

Commenters expressed concern the Purpose and Need statement lacks sufficient detail. Commenters stated the lack of detail weakens the DEIS because alternatives cannot be adequately evaluated by the Purpose and Need statement. Requests for amendments to the Purpose and Need description were requested to demonstrate how the proposed rule will address key issues.



Theme 2 – Adequacy of Rationale

Commenters expressed concern that the proposed exemption was evaluated and rejected when the 2001 Roadless Rule was originally promulgated. Commenters stated the agency is responsible for providing rationale that is not arbitrary or capricious and based on fact patterns or conditions that have changed since the original rejection of exemption as a preferred and durable solution.

Commenters also expressed concern that the state’s petition, which declares the 2001 Roadless Rule is an unnecessary burden to development activities in the Tongass National Forest, was not an accurate representation of the actual application of the existing rule. Commenters state the existing rule provides flexibility by allowing special use exemptions that permit reasonable development that maintains the overall character of roadless areas. Commenters cite a minimum of 57 project exemptions recently passed that have allowed road construction, mining, establishment of hydropower utilities, transmission interties, and alternative modes of transportation.

Theme 3 – Administrative Changes

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS lacked rationale for the proposed administrative changes that makes adjustments to authority and process related to inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) and the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. Commenters expressed concern that the Purpose and Need did not consider the impact the proposed rule will have on the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan.

Theme 4 – Alignment with Alternative Selection

Commenters do not think the preferred alternative satisfies key Purpose and Need issues. Commenters vocalized concern the exemption does not meet the stated needs for a durable solution that (1) accommodates the unique biological, social, and economic characteristics of the region and (2) mitigates controversy associated with the management of roadless areas.

DEIS Analyses

Commenters submitted numerous and wide-ranging comments with regards to the DEIS analyses. Themes identified in these comments included data adequacy, methodology, use of Forest Plan, justification of Purpose and Need, requests for additional analyses, analyses for NEPA compliance, data integration, and conflicting logic. A more detailed description for each theme follows.

Theme 1 – Adequacy of Data and Information

Commenters expressed general and specific concern with regards to the adequacy of the data and information used in the DEIS analyses. Commenters were concerned that the latest and best available information was not used for all of the DEIS analyses. Additionally, concerns that traditional knowledge was not adequately incorporated into the analyses was discussed. A list of more up-to-date and better available data and/or information described by commenters include but are not limited to:

- Roadless inventory data
- Subsistence resource use data
- Pink salmon population data
- Traditional territory data
- Tourism and visitor data



- Old-growth habitat conservation strategy information
- American and Pacific marten information
- Island ecology information
- Old-growth tree data (location, quantity, age, species, genetics, VOCs, and inventory of champion trees)
- Baseline fisheries population data
- Yellow cedar data
- Queen Goshawk nest and foraging areas
- U.S. Forest Service Plans for Maintaining Regional Ecosystem Diversity
- Use of recreation opportunity spectrum descriptions
- Young-growth age class data
- Climate projections

Theme 2 – Adequacy of Methodology

Commenters expressed general and specific concern with the methodology used in some of the DEIS analyses. Commenters were concerned that the results of the analyses were not accurate due to issues with methodology. Requests for using a time horizon of 250 years was requested and considered to be accurate for old-growth habitat. Additionally, commenters considered the reuse of the 2016 Forest Plan to be inadequate for addressing the impact exemption will have on the area. A list of specific concerns related to methodological issues include but are not limited to topics such as:

- Temporal scales for wildlife populations
- Temporal scales for old-growth habitat development
- Impacts to inventoried roadless areas with developmental land use designations
- Omission of scenic views in cost-benefit analysis
- Reuse of the 2016 Forest Plan Analyses
- Viability risks for wildlife

Theme 3 – Range of Alternatives

Commenters submitted several concerns related to the alternatives and associated methodology. Concerns that issues with the alternative methodology means a key NEPA requirement was not met. Commenters expressed concern that the range of alternatives were not reasonable and were contradictory with arbitrary differences. Concern were raised that the alternative range lacked an alternative that expanded protections for all roadless areas not included in the original 2001 Roadless Rule rulemaking. Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS did an inadequate job of accurately identifying the differences between alternatives, ignoring a key requirement of the DEIS and misrepresenting the alternatives. Commenters also stated concern with the integrity of the alternative selection and consideration. Commenters were concerned that the U.S. Forest Service selected alternatives to provide a false narrative with regards to alternative consideration because the administration had already arbitrarily predetermined the outcome of the rulemaking.

Theme 4 – Justification of Purpose and Need

Commenters expressed general and specific concern that DEIS analyses do not support the Purpose and Need. Commenters stated that no analyses were undertaken to substantiate the need for exemption. Commenters stated that analyses should be undertaken that justify the socioeconomic needs for and durability of an exemption.

Theme 5 – Additional Analyses

Commenters expressed wide-ranging concerns that the DEIS did not adequately address impacts the proposed rule will have on numerous issues important to the region, including local economic, environmental, and social characteristics. By not incorporating these characteristics unique to the region into the analyses, the DEIS fails to effectively evaluate and compare alternatives and the impacts the proposed rule will have on the local economy, environment, and society. The following list provides impact and effect analyses requested for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests, as well as adjacent National Park Service Lands and the Biosphere Reserve. This list provides broad examples of commenter concerns and does not include all nuances of these numerous and varied requests.

- Proposed Rule Impacts on Society:
 - Energy resources
 - Landless and marine traffic issues
 - Cultural resources survey
 - Traditional use areas
 - Climate effects on society (including public health and subsistence resources)
 - Visitor experiences and viewsheds
- Proposed Rule Impacts on Environment:
 - General site-specific impacts
 - Various wildlife species
 - Endangered species
 - Subsistence resources
 - Site-specific impacts to anadromous salmon stream miles
 - Climate effects on environment
 - Habitat fragmentation (including the exemption feedback effect on climate)
 - Wildlife connectivity and movement corridors between TNF and NPS land
 - Geology (edge effects, mass erosion, channel erosion, and blocked coverts)
 - Vegetation
 - Illegal hunting and harvesting
 - Environmental quality (light, noise, natural sounds, air, and water)
 - Qualities of the biosphere reserve
 - Invasive species and pathogens
 - Young-growth harvests
 - Marine habitat
 - Wilderness qualities
- Proposed Rule Impacts on Economy:
 - Cost-Benefit Analyses for:
 - Tourism
 - Special use permits
 - Fisheries
 - Recreation
 - Game populations
 - Road construction and maintenance
 - Timber harvests



- Rule change
 - Ecosystem services
 - Climate effects on economy
 - Scenic integrity
 - Federal and state budgets
 - U.S. Forest Service losses due to below-cost timber sales
 - Employment
- Other and Effects Analyses:
 - Impact roads will have on wildlife
 - Impact of road density on wolf populations
 - Impacts roads will have on fisheries
 - Impact of high-grading timber on biodiversity
 - Impact of roads on subsistence resources
 - Impact of mining on area
 - Long-term secondary impacts
 - Adaptive risk management

Theme 6 – Analyses for NEPA Compliance

Commenters expressed general and specific concerns that the DEIS analyses conducted were insufficient for compliance with NEPA. Commenters made specific mention to the lack of a regulatory risk assessment, biological assessment, and economic analysis.

Theme 7 – Data Integration

Commenters express concern that the DEIS did not use data from the Regulatory Impact Assessment. They made requests to include these data, such as historical timber harvests and road density during the temporary exemption period, in the DEIS section on the affected environment for consistency and completeness.

Theme 8 – Conflicting Logic

Commenters expressed concern related to conflicting logic in the DEIS. Commenters were concerned conclusions made in the DEIS are incongruent with the results of analyses and historical decisions. Historical findings using information from the same or similar analyses produced different conclusions with regards to the impacts the proposed exemption will have on the local economy, environment, and society. Examples include:

- Acknowledgement that road construction will negatively impact marine wildlife, then the claim that the proposed rule will have negligible impact to marine habitat.
- Stating the proposed rule has a high probability of maintaining viable and well-distributed wildlife populations without providing scientific rationale.
- NEPA related documents stating the proposed rule will not lead to more logging when the state’s petition and elected officials have demonstrated the purpose of the proposed rule is to help facilitate the expansion and revitalization of the timber industry.

- Reusing analyses used for previous evaluations and decisions related to rejection of the exemption alternative and changing the conclusion without additional analyses that demonstrate exemption meets Purpose and Need.
- Statement that the proposed rule will not result in a substantial loss of roadless protections when the proposed rulemaking reverses all roadless protections established by the 2001 Roadless Rule.

DEIS Editorial Changes

Commenters made requests to expand information in the EIS. Themes associated with these requests included expansion of the comparative summary among alternatives, descriptions of content related to the Chugach National Forest, updates to the public involvement process, amendment to clarify land use designations procedures, summarizing results from 2016 Forest Plan, and discussion of young-growth and reforestation plans.

Theme 1 – Comparative Summary Among Alternatives

Commenters requested that the use of the comparative summary in the impacts to Wetlands section be expanded to additional sections, including the Water Quantity and Quality, Air Quality, General Vegetation, General Wildlife Species/Habitat, and General Aquatics sections in chapter 1.

Theme 2 – Chugach Forest

Commenters requested generally and specifically that the Chugach National Forest be discussed more thoroughly through the environmental impact statement to provide consistency and clarity. Specific requests to add more detailed descriptions of why administrative boundary changes are needed and what is included as part of the administrative actions. Additionally, commenters requested more detailed descriptions of the area and the inclusion of an area map.

Theme 3 – Administrative Changes: Public Involvement

Commenters requested the EIS include a more detailed description of the public involvement process for administrative changes to include how the Regional Forester would consider any public comments received on the administrative corrections or modifications to the Chugach National Forest.

Theme 4 – Amendment for Land Use Designations

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS does an insufficient job evaluating the impact the proposed rule will have on land use designations. Commenters made general and specific requests for the DEIS to be amended to include more detail with regard to the restrictions and permissions for developmental land use designations. Specific details were requested for timber production and road construction designations. Commenters also indicated that Alaska Roadless Areas and LUD II are not suitable for timber production.

Theme 5 – Summarizing Results from 2016 Forest Plan

Commenters requested that the EIS summarize the effects of various impacts referenced in the 2016 Forest Plan for completeness and improved readability.



Theme 6 – Young-Growth and Reforestation Plans

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS does not include reference or specifics for reforestation plans or young-growth production. Requests to include details with regards to reforestation and young-growth production were requested. Commenters requested the agency to include maximum limits for logging in the proposed rule.

Theme 7 – Power Site Classifications

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS does not disclose power site classifications. They made requests to include these classifications.

Theme 8 – Improvement of DEIS Maps

Commenters expressed concern with the quality of the maps used in the DEIS. Commenters made requests to improve the map quality to better show existing protections.

Other DEIS Concerns

Commenters expressed other overarching concerns related to the DEIS. Themes include concerns with integrity, disclosure, accuracy, ambiguity related to administrative changes and subsequent NEPA processes, pending and approved development projects, and concern that the DEIS supports selection of Alternative 1. A more detailed description for each theme follows.

Theme 1 – Integrity

Commenters expressed concern with regards to the integrity of the DEIS, as well as the U.S. Forest Service's management of the proposed rulemaking process and public lands. Commenters indicated that the DEIS reflects the objectives of two timber companies and excludes community-focused needs. Commenters state the DEIS is biased and downplays the negative effects that exemption will have on old-growth habitats that sustain local economies and communities. Commenters expressed concern regarding the U.S. Forest Service's integrity and ability to effectively carry out its mission to care for the land and serve the public. Concerns with corruption were also stated, including critical data related to the proposed rule being removed from the U.S. Forest Service public portal.

Theme 2 – Disclosure

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS fails to disclose that the majority of public comments received during the scoping process demonstrate overwhelming public opposition to exemption.

Theme 3 – Accuracy

Commenters expressed concern that statements made in the DEIS and other NEPA related document were not accurate. Commenters also made requests to remove inaccurate information from the DEIS. Example statements that commenters highlight as inaccurate include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The DEIS claim that timber harvests are necessary to maintain or improve roadless characteristics, as well as maintain and improve fish and wildlife habitat is an inaccurate assertion. Commenters state that the intensive management practices are determined by ALASKA STAT. §16.05.255 which are at odds with roadless characteristics.
- The DEIS claim that logging in the Tongass National Forest will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



- The DEIS description of 2001 Roadless Rule limits on development.

Theme 4 – Ambiguous Process for Administrative Changes

Commenters expressed concern the administrative changes in the proposed rule will grant the Regional Forester the ability make land use decisions and repeal roadless rule protections without sufficient oversight. Commenters request more detailed descriptions of oversight for the administrative changes process. Commenters requested section 294.51(a)(2) be removed from the proposed rule.

Theme 5 – Subsequent NEPA Processes

Commenters recommended the USFS provide clarification on the process for subsequent NEPA analyses for future ground-disturbing activities and how future site-specific NEPA analyses relate to this EIS as well as the 2016 Forest Plan Final EIS. In addition, the commenters recommended the final EIS include a flow chart to better explain the process and the relationship to other NEPA documents.

Theme 6 – Pending and Approved Development Projects

Commenters expressed concern that the DEIS did not address how the proposed rulemaking process will impact pending and approved development projects in roadless areas. They made requests to include these details in the FEIS.

Theme 7 – Support for Alternative 1

Commenters express concern that the DEIS supports the selection of Alternative 1 based on key issues, such as the conservation of terrestrial habitat, aquatic habitat, biological diversity, broad local economies, cultural traditions, Alaska Native culture, subsistence, and community well-being. Commenters also state that Alternative 1 supports the key issue of reducing conflicted related to roadless rule protections. Commenters expressed concern and confusion that Alternative 6 was selected over the existing rule.

Compliance Related Procedural Concerns

Commenters expressed wide ranging concerns regarding procedural compliance with various policies and regulations. A more detailed description for each theme follows.

Theme 1 – Misuse of Funds

Commenters expressed concerns that the U.S. Forest Service misused congressionally appropriated funds to support the development of the proposed rule. Further, commenters state the use of federal funds for the establishment of the federal advisory committee violated the Federal Advisory Act by fully funding a state-run advisory committee.

Theme 2 – Regulatory Planning and Review, Executive Order 12866

Commenters expressed concern the U.S. Forest Service did not use the best available information or science to evaluate the costs and benefits of the proposed rule, questioning whether the agency satisfies its responsibilities under E.O. 12866.



Theme 3 – Role of Science in Planning, 36 CFR § 219.3

Commenters expressed concern that the U.S. Forest Service did not use the best available information or science to evaluate the costs and benefits of the proposed rule. Planning regulation 36 C.F.R. 219.3 requires the agency to use the best available scientific information and document how the information was applied to inform the planning decision. Commenters expressed concern the agency is out of compliance with regulation 36 C.F.R. 219.3.

Theme 4 – Reducing Regulation and Controlling Regulatory Costs, Executive Order 13771

Commenters expressed concern that the U.S. Forest Service inaccurately stated the proposed rule satisfies E.O. 13771 because the proposed exemption is a new regulatory action. Commenters further state the agency did not adequately evaluate the costs associated with the proposed rulemaking.

Theme 5 – National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans, 16 U.S.C. § 1604

Commenters expressed concern the evaluation of alternatives and the proposed rule were prepared in a manner inconsistent with the National Forest System Land and Resource Management Plans sections (a), (c), (f), (g) and (k).

Theme 6 – Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. §1531 et seq.

Commenters expressed concern that the proposed rulemaking process is not compliant with the Endangered Species Act. A non-exhaustive list of specific species commenters escalated includes the marbled murrelet, short tailed albatross, humpback whale, and Eskimo curlew.

Theme 7 – Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. ch. 51

Commenters expressed concern the proposed rulemaking is not compliant with the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act. Commenters cite inconsistencies in the DEIS and the agency's determination on the impact the proposed rule will have on subsistence.

Theme 8 – National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470

Commenters express concern the proposed rulemaking process is not compliant with the National Historic Preservation Act. Commenters indicate that the agency is required to conduct a cultural resource and historic property inventory.

Section 2 – Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan 2016 Forest Plan

Theme 1 – Compliance with the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (TLMP)

Commenters expressed concern that the proposed administrative changes to the Roadless Rule will lead to changes in the suitability designations in the TLMP. Commenters state the use of administrative changes in the proposed rule to change IRAs differs from previous rulemaking proceedings. Commenters assert the proposed use of administrative changes in the proposed rule conflicts with the historical and intended use of administrative change procedures. Commenters expressed concerns that the proposed rule is an attempt to circumvent regulatory procedures (e.g., adopting a plan amendment and conducting an environmental review).



Theme 2 – Authority

Commenters expressed concerns that the Secretary does not have the authority to change the 2016 Forest Plan without an EIS and an environmental assessment. Commenters stated the 2016 Forest Plan does not address the impacts that changing timber designations will have on roadless areas, which is required. Commenters stated concern that the proposed changes will modify approved FEIS and Records of Decisions. Additionally, commenters stated concern the determinations that the Forest Plan is in alignment with Tongass Conservation Strategy and Recreation Opportunity Spectrum guidance.

Theme 3 – 2016 Forest Plan Collaborative and Supportive

Commenters stated concern the proposed exemption will ultimately result in changes to the 2016 Forest Plan. Commenters stated the 2016 Forest Plan is the product of years of collaboration and compromise among diverse stakeholders that struck a careful balance among conservation and resource extraction interests. Concern that the roadless rulemaking process only relies on input from a non-representative stakeholder groups convened by Alaska, whereas the 2016 TLMP amendment is based on recommendations from a duly convened federal advisory committee that complied with all procedural and substantive requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Section 3 – Application of the Roadless Rule

Commenters expressed specific and general support for the DEIS alternatives. Notably, 96% of public comments stating a preferred action (less than 98% of commenters) were in favor of keeping the 2001 Roadless Rule intact. The following sections briefly summarize the reasons and concerns raised in support or opposition to each of the alternatives evaluated in the DEIS.

Alternative 1 - Keep Existing 2001 Roadless Rule (Alternative 1)

The majority of comments received supported the existing 2001 Roadless Rule as expressed by support for a no action alternative or as opposition to the Alaska-Specific Roadless Rule or full exemption alternatives. Commenters made explicit requests to keep the 2001 Roadless Rule in place for Tongass and Chugach National Forests. The rationale for continuing to support the 2001 Roadless Rule is wide-ranging, but generally included themes related to social equity, human health, ecological health, socioeconomic considerations, community-focused land use management, and development. Rationale for opposing exemption included the aforementioned support categories as well as issues with access, deregulated or unpoliced standards, and industry-focused development. Each of these themes are discussed in more detail in the respective sections later in the report.

Alternative 6 - Proposed Exemption

About 1% of comments received were in support of Alternative 6 or opposition to Alternative 1. Concern themes for support of exemption included socioeconomic considerations, land use management, access, and development. Each of these themes are discussed in more detail in the respective sections later in the report.

Alternatives 2–5

A very minor number of comments (estimated to be less than 1%) were received with regards to Alternatives 2–5. The concern themes for each alternative 2–5 are discussed the following sections.



Theme 1 – Alternative 2 Support and Opposition

Commenters expressed support for Alternative 2 because it protects current roadless areas and expands protections, while balancing timber harvest, conservation, and management goals.

Commenters expressed opposition to Alternative 2 because of concerns with opening protected areas to logging.

In some instances, commenters expressed preference for Alternative 1 and then provided secondary preferences. Individuals listing Alternative 2 as a secondary preference did so because there would not be a significant net change in acres protected.

Theme 2 – Alternative 3

Commenters expressed support for Alternative 3 because the designations of the Roadless Areas will be updated where previous development and timber harvest has occurred. Commenters also expressed support for Alternative 3 because it limits new natural resource extraction and development to previously developed areas, keeping the scale of development small.

Commenters expressed general opposition towards Alternative 3 as it would extend areas that allow logging.

Theme 3 – Community Priority Areas

Commenters expressed support for the Community Priority Areas outlined in Alternative 3 because of a preference for local communities to benefit economically from small-scale development and resource extraction that would occur under this alternative.

Theme 4 – Alternative 4

Commenters express support for Alternative 4, as it provides for scenic watersheds and Audubon priorities. These commenters consider Alternative 4 to be a compromise that allows for economic development and the protection of roadless characteristics.

Commenters stated confusion with the inclusion of the Timber Priority LUD within the Alaska Roadless Rule and requested clarity on how land use designations would change under this alternative. Commenters expressed opposition to Alternative 4 because it would convert inventoried roadless areas into roadless priority areas, which reduce protections for these designated areas. Commenters made requests to exclude this consideration from the alternative.

Theme 5 – Alternative 5

No comments were received in support of Alternative 5. Commenters expressed opposition to Alternative 5 because it would convert inventoried roadless areas into roadless priority areas, which reduce protections for these designated areas.

Changes to Alternatives

Theme 1 - Alternative Combinations

Multiple commenters requested aspects of Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 be combined. Specifically, commenters wanted areas available for expanded protections described in Alternative 2 to be given roadless protections under the 2001 Roadless Rule.



Theme 2 - Alternative Modification – Expand Protections

Commenters wrote in support of an alternative that would increase protections. Commenters expressed support for expanding the Roadless Protections in the state of Alaska, so additional lands would be designated as off-limits to development. Commenters specifically requested expanded protections for specific watershed areas including, but not limited to, T77 and TNC/Audubon Conservation Areas, outside of current roadless areas.

Theme 3 - Alternative Modification – Land Use Designations

Commenters expressed concern that Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide for a variety of management approaches within roadless areas through land management categories inconsistent with current practices. Examples include Land Use Designation (LUD) II Priority, Watershed Priority, Roadless Priority, Community Priority, and Timber Priority. Commenters made requests to use the same LUD categories in the Forest Plan to allow for better integration.

Section 4 – Social Equity

Numerous and diverse comments were received that expressed concerns related to social equity and well-being. These concerns are detailed in the following sections.

Tribal Nations and Alaska Natives

Many concerns were received related to consultation with Tribal Nations, as well as incorporation of Alaska Native concerns and best available information into the decision-making process. Issues related to these topics are discussed in detail within the respective sections under the NEPA and Procedural Concerns (Section 1). Additional concerns pertinent to Tribal Nations were received and include themes such as fiduciary responsibility, cooperating agency process, land allotment access, and subsistence land use. These themes are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Theme 1 – Fiduciary Responsibility

Several tribes submitted concern that the United States' fiduciary responsibility to protect and refrain from impairing tribal dependent resources has been subverted by the Alaska roadless rulemaking process. Tribes submitted concerns that the U.S. government, as the Fiduciary Trustee entrusted to protect natural resources used by tribal nation's, needs to act to protect the rights, resources and habitats, human health, and livelihoods of the tribal citizens in Alaska. Commenters made requests to incorporate the comments received from tribes and Alaska Natives into the decision process. Explicit requests to keep the existing 2001 Roadless Rule protections were also received.

Commenters stated concern that legally mandatory cooperation with Tribal Nations was inadequate and the regulatory standards for tribal consultation were not implemented. Further, changes to inventoried roadless area and the implementation as it relates to the TLMP requires legally mandated consultation with Tribal Nations (36 C.F.R.291.4). Concerns were raised the agency's failure to consult and collaborate with Tribal Nations is an indication of impaired performance of the agency.

Theme 2 – Cooperating Agency Process

Several concerns were raised in response to the U.S. Forest Service's management of the cooperating agency process. Commenters stated concerns about the inconsistent reimbursement process. For example, Tribal Nations



were not reimbursed for direct costs associated with participation as a cooperating agency, while the U.S. Forest Service compensated at least \$2 million to Alaska State officials for their participation. Tribal Nations state they participated in good faith, investing substantial time and resources to provide meaningful comments. All Tribal Nations participating as a Cooperating Agency signed a letter opposing the full exception and their concerns and considerations were not incorporated.

Theme 3 – Land Allotment

Concern was submitted that the 2001 Roadless Rule prevents Alaska Native Vietnam veterans from accessing the land allotments that were granted to them for their service.

Theme 4 – Specific Areas for Protection

Commenters submitted requests to protect specific watersheds important for cultural heritage and tradition, as well as subsistence use. Commenters requested that Watershed Priority protections be applied to these areas. Commenters stated concern over the impact the proposed rule will have on habitat quality and game population stability. Further, communities raised concern that community use maps used in the DEIS were inadequate and need to be updated.

Theme 5 – Subsistence Land Use

Commenters made statements that subsistence resources are not only important sources for food security and the livelihoods of Alaska Natives, but also have substantial cultural significance. Tribal Nations state concern that the proposed rule will have disproportional negative impacts on Alaska Native communities, which is in violation of environmental justice regulatory standards.

Environmental Justice

Several concerns were raised regarding environmental justice. Themes included structural discrimination, cultural designations, undue burden, human rights, and racial injustice. These themes are discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Theme 1 – Structural Discrimination

Commenters submitted concern the established rulemaking processes contribute to a structural practice of discrimination by minimizing or eliminating the voices of marginalized and low-income communities.

Theme 2 – Cultural Designations

Commenters requested that environmental justice issues for the proposed rulemaking be evaluated based on impacts to culture, not solely based on race designations.

Theme 3 – Undue Burden

Commenters submitted concern the proposed rule makes local communities responsible for conducting community scale analyses. This puts undue economic burden on local, marginalized and low-income communities.

Additionally, commenters expressed concern that the proposed rule will accelerate impacts of climate change and that these climate effects will negatively and disproportionately affect minority communities, especially rural

Alaska Natives communities in Southeast Alaska. Commenters cited the E.O. 12898 as justification requiring the agency to incorporate these considerations into the decision-making process.

Theme 4 – Human Rights and Racial Injustice

Commenters expressed concern that a full exemption is a human rights issue and is an act of racially motivated environmental justice. Commenters raised concerns that the exemption is a violation of indigenous rights and will contribute to the ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples’ identities, cultures, and livelihoods reliant on intact and healthy forests and watersheds.

Other Social Concerns

Theme 1 – Cultural Significance and Subsistence

In addition to Alaska Natives’ concerns regarding subsistence, the broader Alaska communities expressed concern that the proposed rule will negatively impact their subsistence resources. Commenters expressed general and specific concerns related to subsistence resources and the short and long-term impacts that exemption will have on these resources. Commenters submitted concerns related to specific fish and game. Commenters stated that subsistence resources are necessary for their food security, recreation, medicine, and cultural traditions. Protecting the Tongass National Forest from logging and development allows for cultural traditions to continue and to be taught to future generations. Commenters submitted detailed descriptions of areas important for these resources.

Theme 2 – Collaborative and Supportive

Numerous commenters consider the existing roadless rule to be collaborative and supportive of diverse stakeholder perspectives. Commenters stated the 2001 Roadless Rule effectively balances socioeconomic development and conservation goals. Commenters expressed concern that the exemption rolls back 20 years of decisions that the public supports and consider resolved. Commenters stated the unprecedented public support demonstrates that Alternative 1 meets diverse stakeholder needs and makes economic sense.

Theme 3 – Protection of Reputation

Commenters expressed concern that the proposed rulemaking process has caused considerable division within the communities. They also expressed concerns that the division and continued discourse will have a negative impact on the region’s reputation. Commenters expressed concerns that a negative reputation will cause a decline in tourism revenue.

Theme 4 – Protection of Potential Knowledge

Commenters stated concern the proposed exemption could lead to the loss of future research opportunities and discoveries due to loss of biodiversity. Commenters stated extensive research of old-growth stands is needed to better understand the value of products and services they provide. Additionally, concerns that the Roadless Rule protects the land as a knowledge source to study activities of ancient humans and the migration of the first humans to North America were made as justification to keep the existing protections.

Theme 5 – Religious Protections

Many comments were received that expressed concern that the exemption goes against religious beliefs. Commenters express an obligation to protect and preserve the Tongass and Chugach National Forests for religious reasons citing the Bible.



Theme 6 – Intrinsic Value

Commenters expressed support for Alternative 1 and support for maintaining and/or extending protections of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Commenters cited an intrinsic value in undisturbed, intact wild areas. Commenters stated intact forests provide the necessary resources for jobs, subsistence, tourism, recreation, and protected habitat. Commenters made requests for these areas to remain undisturbed for a sustainable future and national heritage.

Section 5 – Human Health

Many comments were received concerning the impact the proposed rule will have on human health and well-being. Commenters described intrinsic connections between human and ecological health. Many commenters are very concerned about the immediate well-being and long-term survival of humans. Themes identified are described in more detail for the following sections.

Environmental Health

Theme 1 – Air Quality

Commenters expressed concern that exemption can lead to the removal of trees, which can impact air quality by limiting oxygen production and air purification. Commenters expressed concerns that removing protections can lead to secondary (indirect) effects that can increase air toxic emissions, further reducing air quality. Commenters raised concern that negative impacts to air quality from the removal of trees and secondary (indirect) effects can exacerbate or worsen pre-existing conditions and disease risk. Commenters were also concerned with sensitive populations like children and the elderly. Commenters also expressed concerns that an increase in disease risk can lead to increases in health care costs, creating a reinforcing feedback loop where limitations to health care access further worsen health outcomes.

Theme 2 – Total Environment Effects on Health

Commenters stated the quality of the total environment (soil, air, water, and food) is intrinsically connected to human health and survival. Concern exempting the Tongass and Chugach National Forests from the Roadless Rule will negatively impact the quality of the total environment and subsequently negatively impact human health and well-being.

Human Health

Theme 1 – Global Importance

Many commenters expressed concern for the global loss of forests to deforestation and wildfires. Commenters stated concern that global development and habitat loss have made large intact forests increasingly rare. Commenters expressed concern that exempting the Tongass and Chugach National Forests can result in further loss in intact ecosystems that have global importance for sustaining life and human survival.

Theme 2 – Ecopsychology

Commenters expressed that being in the Tongass National Forest provides a refuge that bolsters mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. Commenters stated concern exempting the Tongass and Chugach National Forests from



the Roadless Rule will lead to activities that harm the old-growth ecosystems that provide mental, spiritual, and physical well-being to people. Commenters highlighted concerns that removal of old-growth trees and secondary development would result in degradation of the environment and loss of the wilderness that will not recover quickly, resulting in spiritual and cultural loss for many generations. There was concern expressed that the negative ecopsychological effects resulting from loss of the old-growth forests will be magnified for those who witness it directly.

Theme 3 – Pharmaceutical Potential

Commenters expressed concern that the old-growth forests of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests have not been assessed for their pharmaceutical value. Concerns also were concerned that the exemption will result in the loss of future research potential and resources that could lead to new medicines and medical treatments.

Theme 4 – Human Survival

Many commenters expressed concern that the proposed rule will lead to natural extraction and developmental activities that will result in environmental degradation significant enough to negatively impact long-term human survival. These commenters requested the existing protections are maintained to ensure human survival.

Section 6 – Ecological Health

Climate

Theme 1 – Carbon Reserves and Sequestration

Many commenters expressed detailed concern that exemption will have substantial impacts on carbon reserves and sequestration. Commenters said that by keeping the 2001 Roadless Rule protections in place, a considerable amount of carbon sequestration can occur that will contribute to climate change mitigation, while maintaining critical habitat. Commenters cite science that demonstrates old-growth forests sequester considerable amounts of carbon, significantly more than young-growth forests. Additionally, commenters express concern that logging old-growth forests will release substantial carbon reserves in addition to the loss of the carbon sequestration capabilities, contributing to the acceleration of climate change. Commenters states concerns that carbon sequestration capabilities and reserves lost due to logging cannot be recovered on a time scale sufficient for the mitigation demand. Commenters also expressed concern that secondary development activities (logging, road construction, and resource extraction) will impact the capacity of other flora to sequester carbon. Many commenters also expressed concern that accelerated climate change effects will negatively impact the health and survival of humans, plants, fish and wildlife.

Theme 2 – Impact on Environmental Parameters and Aquaculture

Commenters provided detailed concerns that exemption will lead to the removal of trees and damage to ecosystems that can exacerbate climate change effects, including the disruption of normal environmental parameters such as environmental fluid dynamics, ambient air temperature, water temperature, rainfall, and water acidity—all of which, can have detrimental impacts on ecosystem services and natural resource availability.

Many commenters expressed concern regarding the acidification of waters. They expressed concerns that acidified waters will reduce the survival of calcifying species such as oysters, clams, corals, urchins, and certain phytoplankton that are food sources for humans and other wildlife. These losses will have substantial impacts on the ecosystem structure, food systems, and the economy.



Theme 3 – Emissions

Many commenters expressed detailed concern that exemption would lead to developmental activities that increase the release of greenhouse gas emissions. Atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (water vapor, nitrous oxide, carbon dioxide, methane, and chlorofluorocarbons) have changed with increases of emissions from human activities such as deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, production of energy, land use changes, landfill waste decomposition, as well as industrial and agricultural practices. Increases in these natural occurring greenhouse gases reinforce the trapping of heat from the sun on Earth. Increases in temperature can create reinforcing feedback loops that can further increase greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Examples include increased water vaporization, demand for heating and cooling, and increased releases of methane and carbon dioxide from thawing ice stores and permafrost.

Theme 4 – Natural Disasters and Displacement

Commenters expressed concern that exemption can lead to secondary activities, such as natural resource extraction and development activities that exacerbate uncertain and extreme weather events that can have catastrophic consequences, such as increases in the incidence of flooding, fires, drought, landslides, as well as intensified hurricanes. Increased incidence and severity of natural disasters can have profound economic and public safety consequences by putting human health, infrastructure, and natural resources at risk. Additionally, commenters stated concerns that these secondary activities exacerbating climate change effects will lead to the displacement of communities.

Ecosystems

Theme 1 – Protection of Wildlife and Habitat Quality

Commenters expressed concern that exempting the Tongass from the Roadless Rule could lead to disturbance, development, or logging that will damage sensitive and pristine ecosystems permanently. They also noted concerns that these ecosystems will never fully be recovered. Subsistence users and the general public expressed concern that exemption will lead to natural extraction activities that have a multitude of negative impacts on habitat and wildlife survival. Commenters voiced the importance of protect essential habitat important for the viability many socially, economically, aesthetically, and environmentally considerations.

Theme 2 – Old-Growth Habitat

Commenters expressed support for keeping the 2001 Roadless Rule intact because it protects old-growth habitats within the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Commenters state the old-growth forest provides sensitive habitat for over 30 endemic species. Commenters cite the benefits that old-growth forests provide and consider them to be essential for the survival and viability of the ecosystem in the region. Commenters describe the rarity of old-growth habitats, which make it a critically valuable resource to keep protected as an intact forest.

Theme 3 – Biodiversity

Commenters expressed concerns that exemption will lead to disturbances in sensitive habitat that would negatively impact both plant and animal communities and cause decreased biodiversity in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests and neighboring lands. Commenters expressed concerns that reduced biodiversity can lead to ecosystem collapse.



Theme 4 – Invasive Species and Pests

Commenters voiced concern that exemption will increase activities that facilitate the spread and cultivation of invasive and pest species. They made requests to consider the negative impacts invasive species and pests have had in other heavily logged forests. Commenters also expressed concern that invasive and pest species can decimate forests.

Geology

Commenters submitted concern that exemption will lead to activities that negatively impact the geology of the area. Some were concerned that removing the 2001 Roadless Rule protections will lead to new roads and clearcutting that will cause soil erosion effects. Specific concerns associated with soil erosion included landslides, river channelization, and impacts to water current and flows.

Plants

Commenters expressed general and specific concern that exemption will lead to secondary activities such as natural resource extraction and developmental that will harm vegetation. Examples of specific concerns included, but are not limited to, loss of trees causing slower nutrient transfer between plants, and loss of symbiotic relationships that will stunt overall vegetative growth for specific ecologically important and sensitive plants.

Wildlife

Theme 1 – Fisheries

Many numerous and varied comments were received concerning impacts that the proposed rule will have on fisheries and associated habitat. Commenters stressed the ecological, economic, and cultural importance that various fish species have regionally. Commenters referred to pristine fish habitat in the region that provides thousands of miles of clean creeks, rivers, and lakes that are important breeding grounds for numerous fish species. Commenters stated concerns that these are some of the last spawning grounds for especially important species.

Commenters made specific requests to protect key watersheds important for fish habitat and viability. Commenters cited complex rearing and spawning behaviors of various fish species that require healthy ecosystems. Many commenters expressed concern that removing the existing 2001 Roadless Rule protections will result in secondary activities that will degrade these habitats. Commenters cited information that demonstrates that some of the last remaining habitat for ecological important species is in Alaska areas protected by the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Commenters submitted concern that unlogged riparian forest zones have not provided sufficient protection for watershed habitats. Commenters referred to bad actors, including industries, that do not obey regulations established to protect aquatic habitats. These bad actors make decisions that exacerbate issues related to soil erosion, such as sedimentation and eutrophication, in ecologically important riparian, estuarine, and oceanic environments.

Theme 2 – General and Specific Requests for Wildlife Protections

Many commenters submitted wide-ranging concerns that exemption will have a multitude of negative impacts on numerous and varied species that have regional ecological, economic, and cultural importance. Detailed comments were submitted that cited evidence that the proposed rule will lead to activities that will have detrimental effects on wildlife habitat, food security, symbiotic relationships, functional behaviors, and overall viability of these



important species. Comments included general and specific requests for protecting broad lists of species. Concerns that recovery and restoration of habitat to protect species following environmental degradation will carry significant economic costs.

Theme 3 – Extinction

Commenters stated the environment of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests provides a unique and critical habitat for various rare and endangered species to live and thrive. Commenters expressed concern that exemption will result in secondary activities that negatively impact rare and endangered species. They also noted concern that exemption will accelerate the current mass extinction event that is reducing the number of plant and animal species worldwide.

Commenters stated the removal of the 2001 Roadless Rule could lead to roads and development that reduce the acreage of suitable undisturbed habitat for sensitive species. This loss of habitat would reduce population sizes of sensitive species and increase their risk of extinction.

Theme 4 – Human and Wildlife Conflict

Commenters stated that maintaining the 2001 Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests will protect habitat and resources necessary to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Concerns were provided that removal of protections can lead to increases in human-wildlife conflict.

Theme 5 – Roads Displace Wildlife

Commenters expressed concern that exempting the Tongass and Chugach National Forests from the 2001 Roadless Rule will lead to new road construction that will cause further displacement of wildlife. Commenters cite evidence that road development will have detrimental effects on functional behaviors, such as breeding and movement, that are essential for viable, healthy wildlife populations.

Theme 6 – Importance of Apex Predators

Commenters stated concern that exemption will negatively impact the viability of apex predators that are important for the health of ecosystems. Commenters express concern that exemption will degrade habitat important to several apex predators important for regulating populations of herbivores. Commenters cite science that top down predator-prey regulation supports the health of trees, as well as the overall health of the forests.

Section 7 – Socioeconomic Considerations

Many commenters submitted comments pertaining to socioeconomic considerations related to the existing and proposed rule. The majority of these comments stated preference for the existing rule 2001 Roadless Rule, providing wide-ranging justification that current protections support many diverse industries important to the region.

Protection of Ecosystem Services

Commenters expressed numerous concerns that exemption will result in the loss of ecosystem services including oxygen production, filtration of air, water and soil, as well as loss of fisheries, medicine, and game populations. Commenters were concerned that the loss of these economies would have significant negative economic impact to the region. Additionally, commenters stated concern that activities resulting from the passage of the proposed rule



will require substantial economic investments to restore and recover degraded environments, if they can be recovered. Commenters expressed concerns that these activities will hurt the economic outcome for the region.

Ecotourism

Theme 1 – Tourism is Leading Industry

Many commenters submitted support for keeping the existing 2001 Roadless Rule because these protections support tourism business in the area. Commenters state the economic importance tourism has for the region and neighboring states. Frequently, statistics were submitted that demonstrate tourism industries generate a majority of the economic revenue for the Alaskan economy. Additionally, commenters cite evidence that tourism industries create more jobs than extraction industries do.

Concerns that the proposed rule will negatively impact tourism in the area were frequently stated. Commenters stated that visitors travel from all around the world to see pristine old-growth forests, view wildlife, fish and hunt, experience unique cultural traditions, and generally explore in Alaska's wild areas. Commenters stated concern that the proposed rule will weaken scenery standards and scenic values important for the tourism industry.

Theme 2 – Investments for Tourism

Commenters cited projections that the tourism industry is expected to increase to over 2.4 million visitors in Alaska. Commenters stated concern that the U.S. Forest Service is underprepared to accommodate the projected increase in visitors to the area. Commenters made requests for the agency to make investments that support tourism industries over the timber industry to prepare for the increases in visitation.

Theme 3 – Sufficient Wages

Commenters expressed concern that employment in the tourism industry only provides low-paying, seasonal jobs that are insufficient to support local communities.

Fisheries

Theme 1 – Importance of Fish and Associated Habitats

Many numerous and varied comments were received stating concern that the proposed rule will have wide-ranging negative socioeconomic impacts on fisheries. Commenters stressed the ecological, economic, and cultural importance that various fish species have regionally. Commenters made specific requests to protect economically key watersheds important for fish habitat and viability. Commenters refer to pristine fish habitat in the region that provide thousands of miles of clean creeks, rivers, and lakes that are important breeding grounds for numerous fish species. Commenters also stated that these areas are some of the last spawning grounds for economically important fish species. Commenters expressed concern that removing roadless protections will cause habitat degradation. Commenters also cited research that demonstrates that some of the last remaining habitat for ecological important species are in Alaska areas protected by the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Theme 2 – Fisheries is Leading Economy

Many comments were received referring to the socioeconomic importance of the fishing industry in the region. Commenters cited statistics that demonstrate the fishing industry accounts for over \$2 billion in annual revenue in contrast comparison to the timber industry, which losses millions annually. Commenters stressed the importance of



regional fisheries in providing the majority of the commercial salmon harvests in America. Commenters stated concerns that exemption will result in damaging ecosystems necessary for sustaining this socioeconomically vital resource that supports local livelihoods and provides food security for the region.

Theme 3 – Investment

Commenters made requests to the U.S. Forest Service to invest in restoration and conservation activities important for improving and sustaining healthy fisheries and watersheds. Commenters requested that the Forest Service focus on restoring the streams and habitat, removing or replacing culverts, and improving fish passage, rather than moving forward with the proposed rule. Commenters requested that these investments be made over investments into the timber industry, which is cited as being a minor economic driver in the region.

Theme 4 – Coalition of Seafood Producers

A coalition of professional seafood producers local to southeast Alaska submitted detailed justification for support of keeping the existing 2001 Roadless Rule protections. They describe benefits that the existing 2001 Roadless Rule provides by protecting fisheries and associated habitats. Commenters stressed the importance of healthy fisheries for the socioeconomic resiliency of the region.

Recreation

Commenters stated that outdoor recreation is a major industry contributing to the Alaskan economy. Commenters said the Roadless Rule is crucial to protecting ecosystems that sustain natural resources important for recreational activities like birding, boating, camping, hunting, and fishing. Concern that outdoor recreation generates millions for the Alaskan economy and is worth more than the timber industry was expressed. Commenters were concerned that logging activities in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests will negatively impact recreational activities.

Washington State Economies

Commenters expressed concern that exemption will have substantial negative impacts on economies outside of the state. Several Washington state officials and United States Senators wrote in support of keeping the existing protections in place. Complex, interconnected economies were described in detail as justification.

Mining

Theme 1 – Justification for Support of Alternative 1

Commenters stated the Roadless Rule is in compliance with the Mining Act of 1872, which ensures access to minerals, transportation, and energy development needs in the roadless areas. Commenters also stated that the proposed rule will not have a positive impact on employment for the region, as stated in the DEIS.

Theme 2 – Justification for Support of Alternative 6

Commenters expressed that the proposed rule will lead to the extraction of natural resources, stating exemption will bring jobs to the area, reduce demand for select imports, and stimulate the economy.



Theme 3 – Environmental Impacts

Commenters expressed concern that mining will degrade habitat and negatively affect wildlife viability and human health. Concerns were also provided that it would be difficult for the ecosystem to recover from the damage that natural resource extraction will cause.

Timber Industry

Theme 1 – Market Demand

Commenters acknowledged the historical role the timber industry has played in Southeast Alaska's economy. Commenters expressed concern that the decline in the timber industry in the region is due to factors other than the existing 2001 Roadless rule. Example of factors cited included the difficult terrain and low market demand.

Commenters expressed concern the proposed rule eliminates protections for old-growth habitat, when there is no market demand. Commenters state the timber available for harvest in southeast Alaska satisfies the current market demand under the 2001 Roadless Rule. Commenters cited research showing marketable volumes available for harvest surpass past and future old-growth sale volumes. Commenters also cited two recent timber bids receiving no offers. These specific recent examples are frequently cited and demonstrate lack of market demand for regional timber.

Theme 2 – Subsidization of Timber Industry

Many commenters cited the recently published Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) twenty-year analysis of the Tongass timber program that included costs of road construction and maintenance for timber market access. Commenters expressed concern that the analysis shows the Forest Service lost around \$600 million over two decades, with future projections showing potential losses greater than \$180 million in the next four years. Numerous commenters stated opposition to further subsidization of the timber industry in this area.

Theme 3 – Regulatory Compliance

Commenters expressed concern that exemption will increase economically inviable timber harvests that do not meet the congressionally mandated residual value appraisal standards. Commenters cite recent timber sales prepared by the Forest Service for this region that had deficit appraisals.

Theme 4 – Increase Regulatory Changes

Commenters requested changes to regulatory compliance standards for the timber industry. Requests for expansions of regulatory standards were received. Commenters requesting increases in regulation requested a prohibition on old-growth harvests. Commenters also wanted restrictions on practices that degrade aquatic habitat.

Theme 5 – Decrease Regulatory Changes

Commenters requested changes to regulatory compliance standards for the timber industry. Commenters submitted requests for decreases in regulatory standards. Commenters expressed support for exemption citing flexibility in timber selection for the timber industry.



Theme 6 – Timber Harvest Profits

Commenters stated that any timber harvest profits should stay in the local economy or be used to pay down the federal deficit. Commenters also stated that new roads built to improve industry access need to be paid for by the industries using the roads, rather than taxpayers. There were requests for tax revenue funds and timber harvest profits to be invested in existing road maintenance, trail and recreation cabin maintenance, fire prevention, and watershed and habitat restoration.

Theme 7 – Sustainable Timber Sources

Commenters expressed general support for logging and evidence-based logging practices that are sustainable and protective of ecosystems and communities. Commenters stated that there are plenty of sustainable, young-growth timber available to satisfy the market demand. Commenters stated that harvesting these other timber resources are more sustainable and cost efficient.

Theme 8 – Overseas Exports

Many commenters submitted concern that raw, unprocessed timber is sent overseas for processing. Concerns were provided that timber harvested from the region is done so at an economic loss and that exporting the raw material increases our country's economic loss, while economically benefiting other countries.

Theme 9 – Environmental Impact

Commenters expressed general and specific opposition to logging activities in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Commenters also expressed concern that the proposed rule has the potential to lead to logging activities that degrade the environment. Commenters stated that it will be difficult for the ecosystem to recover from the damage that natural resource extraction will cause.

Theme 10 – Coalition of Timber Industries

A coalition of professional loggers local to southeast Alaska submitted detailed justification for the support of keeping the existing 2001 Roadless Rule protections. They describe benefits that the existing 2001 Roadless Rule has had in shaping small-scale logging operations that are supportive of local economies and conservation, that also reflect the market demand for timber from the region.

Section 8 – Land Management Considerations

Management concerns were numerous and wide-ranging and included topics related to motivation, priorities, and best practices. Commenters provided input regarding management options to be considered or incorporated for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Additional detail about each theme is in the following sections.

Motivation

Theme 1 – Progress, Precedence, and Public Interest

Commenters expressed various overarching concerns with regards to the proposed rule, process, and management of public lands. Many consider the exemption alternative to be a step backwards and are concerned land management decisions for public owned lands are not in alignment with the public's best interest. A majority of public commenters felt decision-makers are advancing an industry biased rule that is at odds with how local and



national communities prefer the forest to be managed. Additionally, some comments were received to change the National Forest Designation to National Park or Monument.

Theme 2 – Management Responsibility and Capacity

Comments were received in favor of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests being managed either federally or by state government, with a majority of the comments in favor of federal management and a very minor number in favor of a state-specific rule. Commenters also submitted concerns that either entities have insufficient capital and capacity to effectively manage the land.

Priorities

Theme 1 – Promotion of Ecosystem Services and Sustainable Industries

Many comments were received requesting the U.S. Forest Service to manage public lands in a manner that promotes and maintains ecosystem services and sustainable industries. Numerous concerns were received that exemption will lead to the irreversible damage of ecosystems important for the socioeconomic stability of the region.

Commenters stated the long-term economic impacts of environmental degradation will significantly outweigh any short-term economic benefits from natural resource extraction and development. Commenters stated investing in the development of sustainable and innovative resource management can mitigate environmental damage including climate change effects, while providing jobs for Alaskans.

Theme 2 – Protection of Critical and Sensitive Habitat

Commenters requested specific geographic areas remain protected under the 2001 Roadless Rule or receive increased protection as a potential Alaska Roadless Area. Commenters cited several reasons, including protection of watershed and habitat, aesthetics and outdoor recreation, and availability of fish and game for subsistence lifestyle maintenance.

Commenters noted that all lands identified in the 2003 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (for the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan revision) and nearly numerous specific geographic locations, spanning Southeast Alaska, need additional protections.

Commenters specifically requested areas known as the Tongass 77 watersheds and TNC/Audubon Conservation Priority Areas remain protected under the 2001 Roadless Rule or receive increased protections. Most of these requests explained that watersheds in these areas are vital to the local ecosystem and the Southeast economy as they contain a substantial portion of Alaska's salmon, char, and trout spawning and rearing habitat. Comments were also received specifically requesting the Chugach National Forest continue to be protected under the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Theme 3 – Investments

Commenters also submitted requests for investment in specific management activities in areas across the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Several provided input suggesting adjustments to Forest Service land management practices. These suggestions were varied, but generally included the following themes.

- Employ local loggers in watershed and habitat restoration efforts.
- Focus on proactive and evidence-based forest management.



- Develop primitive and semi-primitive recreation programs.
- Conduct watershed development and restoration.
- Restore fish and wildlife habitat.
- Conduct maintenance on existing road and trail systems.
- Engage the community and be more collaborative in making decisions that affect the forest.
- Invest in workforce development.
- Invest in community education to minimize ecosystem impacts from all forms of forest-management activity.

Best Practices

Theme 1 – Evidence-Based Decisions

Comments stated concern that the current management decisions are not based on the latest and best available information. Commenters requested the U.S. Forest Service start managing public lands using evidence-based decisions that utilize the best available information.

Theme 2 – Reforming Administration of Timber Sales

Commenters requested that the U.S. Forest Service evaluate the current administration of timber sales in the Tongass due to low-performing sales. Concerns related to the subsidization of timber harvests in the area were provided as justification for the need to reform the timber harvest administration for the area.

Commenters who opposed changes to the 2001 Roadless Rule either requested additional restrictions be placed on resource extraction (i.e., logging, mining) or requested all resource extraction activities in the Tongass National Forest be prohibited.

Theme 3 – Conditional Development and Logging

Commenters expressed support for conditional, community-focused development and evidence-based logging practices that protect ecosystems and local economies. Commenters also indicated that community-focused development is allowed under the existing 2001 Roadless Rule. These commenters also provided suggestions specifically tailored to support future Tongass National Forest timber management and Southeast Alaska communities. Examples of these suggestions include:

- Cease old-growth timber harvest and focus on young-growth or source timber for other more suitable areas.
- Restrict logging operations to those areas where roads have already been constructed.
- Expand roadless protections for the region.
- Focus timber harvest on dead and diseased trees.
- Conduct thinning in clear-cut areas.
- Allow only timber harvest activities that have been thoroughly reviewed by all parties affected.
- Manage for fire suppression (including stated concerns that deforestation can increase fire risk).
- Cease clear-cutting practices.
- Reform U.S. Forest Service outdated old-growth timber ideologies, such as *bridge timber*, especially considering sufficient volumes of suitable young-growth timber.
- Instate overlapping special area designations to ensure protections.
- Reinstate the Transportation Utility System Land Use Designation (TUS LUD) that had been removed in the 2016 version of the Tongass Land Management Plan.



Theme 4 – Holding Bad Actors Accountable

Comments were received that expressed concern that bad actors ignore various regulations in place for ecological protection. Commenters expressed concern that these actors are not being held accountable.

Section 9 – Access and Development

Commenters submitted concerns related to development and access. Themes included justification for an alternative, energy development, road construction, and maintenance.

Application of Alternatives

Theme 1 – Application of Existing Rule (Alternative 1)

Commenters state the existing rule allows development, citing in the last year, that 57 projects including timber sales, mining projects, hydropower projects, geothermal leases and road reconstruction projects have been approved within roadless areas with minimal review requirements, most of which within a month of submission.

Theme 2 – Justification for Proposed Rule (Alternative 6)

Commenters state the existing rule is too restrictive for development. Commenters cite lack of transportation energy, utilities, and other public services and attribute these concerns to the application of the existing rule.

Access

Theme 1 – Energy Infrastructure and Renewable Energy

Commenters provided support for site-specific energy infrastructure projects. Commenters expressed support for the implantation of a wide range of renewable energy technologies in the region. Commenters stated renewable energy would eliminate the area's dependence on diesel for electrical power.

Theme 2 – New Roads

Commenters expressed the need for roads to access social services such as health care, airports, energy, parks, and public transit. They also discussed access for extraction industries.

Commenters expressed general and conditional support for roads. Commenters requested sustainable development of roads, and to focus investments in maintaining existing roads over new construction.

Theme 3 – Opposition to New Roads

Commenters expressed general and specific opposition to new roads. They also noted concern that existing roads are not maintained. Commenters also cited new roads as having restricted access and unavailable for public use as justification for restricting development of new roads.

Theme 4 – Public Transportation

Commenters cited lack of affordable or functional transportation in the region. They expressed concerns that marine access has a higher cost, lower dependability, and increased safety risk. Commenters made specific requests for improved marine access and ferry routes.

Theme 5 – Road Density Limits

Commenters requested road density limits when road systems are connected to communities to reduce impacts associated with overharvest of important ecological and subsistence resources.

Theme 6 – Roads Lead to Commercialization

Commenters expressed concern that new roads will lead to increased commercialization, with a potential to negatively impact local businesses.

Theme 7 – Environmental Impacts

Commenters expressed concern that new roads negatively impact environmental quality. There were also concerns that the removal of existing protections will lead to new roads that cause clearcutting and soil erosion. Commenters expressed specific concerns associated with soil erosion such as landslides, river channelization, current flow impacts, and changes to water chemistry.

Commenters submitted numerous and wide-ranging concerns related to new road construction impacts on watersheds, habitat, and wildlife. Many specific flora and fauna, including many endangered species were specifically listed in the comments.

Theme 8 – Compounded Degradation

Commenters expressed concern that development and natural resource extraction activities cause compounded damage to ecosystems. The initial damage is made worse because bad actors ignoring laws and inflicting damage can cause more damage due to increased access. Issues with illegal poaching, off-road vehicles, noise pollution, and erosion were cited. Concerns that these laws lack enforcement were also made.

Commenters stated that access to local renewable energy would reduce costs for local communities, provide jobs, improve the standard of living, and reduce emissions, which would have climate change benefits.

Section 10 – Resolutions

Resolutions in Support of 2001 Roadless Rule Protections

Resolutions had wide-ranging and numerous considerations that supported keeping the 2001 Roadless Rule intact. Concern themes included community-focused development and economies, maintenance of cultural traditions, protection of wildlife, protection of environmental quality, and protection of community reputation. Investment in community-focused priorities was requested, over the rollback of roadless protections and revitalization of the timber industry. These themes are discussed in more detail in their respective sections.

Resolutions were received from the following groups in support of the existing 2001 Roadless Rule for Alaska.

- a) Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee (Resolution No. 2019-2)
- b) City of Pelican (Resolution No. 2019-7)
- c) Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (Resolution No. 19 – 58)
- d) Alaska Federation of Natives (Resolution No. 19-57; Resolution No. 19-61)



- e) National Congress of American Indians (Resolution No. ABQ-19-029)
- f) The Klawock Fish & Game Advisory Committee
- g) Organized Village of Kake (Resolution No. 2018-24)
- h) Municipality of Skagway (Resolution No. 19-32R)
- i) City Council of Tenakee Springs (Resolution No. 2020-07)
- j) Craig Fish and Game Advisory Council (Resolution No. 2019-1)
- k) Klawock Fish and Game Advisory Committee (Resolution No. 2019-1)
- l) Wrangell Cooperative Association (Resolution No. 12-16-19-02)
- m) The Community of Elfin Cove (Resolution No. 19-01)
- n) Tribal Council of Tribal Council of the Ketchikan Indian Community (Resolution No. KIC 19-29)
- o) Organized Village of Saxman (Resolution No. 2018-10-223)
- p) City of Gustavus (Resolution No. CY 19-31)
- q) Organized Village of Kasaan (Resolution No. OVK-19-10-001)

Resolutions in Support of Rule Change

Resolutions in support of exemption provided considerations for: access, flexible decision-making, revitalization of the timber industry, and deregulation for natural resource extraction and development activities. These themes are discussed in more detail in their respective sections.

Resolutions were received from the following groups in support of exemption or rule change.

- a) City Council of Coffman Cove (Resolution No. 2002)
- b) City and Borough of Wrangell (Resolution No. 12-194503)
- c) The City of Whale Pass (Resolution No. 19-12-05-01)
- d) Ketchikan Gateway Borough (Resolution No. 2785)

Other Resolutions

Resolutions were received in favor of development activities outside the scope of the proposed rulemaking, though indirectly related. These resolutions are not described in further detail here. Additional details are available in the public reading room on the project website found here: (https://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=54511).

- a) Assembly of the City and Borough of Juneau (Resolution No. 1882; Resolution No. 2203)
- b) Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka (Resolution No. 97-678)



- c) Council of the City of Wrangell (Resolution No. 06-97-679)
- d) City of Hoonah (Resolution No. 97-07-13)
- e) City Council of the City of Petersburg (Resolution No. 1490-R)

DRAFT

