

NAME

F/V Coho catcher

Submitted electronically at: <https://www.regulations.gov> Docket # FS-2025-0001.

Attn: Forest Service Special Areas: Roadless Area Conservation; National Forest System Lands

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins:

MAKE SURE TO STATE YOUR OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED ROADLESS RULE RESCISSION

I submit the following comments in opposition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's August 2025 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking proposing to rescind the Roadless Rule on the Tongass National Forest. Inventoried roadless areas are essential for maintaining the productivity and health of Southeast Alaska's fishing industry - roadless areas provide essential spawning, rearing and migratory habitat for salmon – Southeast Alaska's most valuable crop.

TELL THEM ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR FISHERY AND YOUR FISHING COMMUNITY FOR THE RECORD

I am a resident of Sitka, Alaska and own and operate the F/V Coho Catcher, a commercial salmon troller that uses hook and line fishing gear. I target multiple salmon species, including coho salmon, a Southeast Alaska "forest fish" prized by seafood consumers across the United States. **Watersheds within the boundaries of the Tongass National Forest are a major producer of salmon caught in our commercial fisheries, producing 75 percent of the salmon caught in Southeast Alaska each year and roughly two-thirds of the coho harvest.**

Salmon fisheries in general support 1 in 10 jobs in Southeast Alaska. My troll fishery includes up to 1,000 fishery permit holders in any given year. Troll fishermen are overwhelmingly Alaska residents, making our fleet the second largest in Alaska, next to Bristol Bay's. My hometown of Sitka is one of the top twenty seafood ports in the United States. Ten percent of Sitka residents are active fishermen and our resident fishermen's earnings are the fourth highest in the state of Alaska. Sitka also has the region's most active troll fleet.

I am a member and one of the many fishermen-owners of the Seafood Producers Cooperative, which has nearly 400 fishermen-owners mostly residing in communities in the Pacific Northwest and Southeast Alaska. Seafood Producers Cooperative owns and operates a processing facility in Sitka which currently employs roughly 100 people; it is one of Sitka's largest private sector employers. SPC markets fish domestically to both retailers and wholesalers and increasingly direct to consumers through e-commerce. Coho salmon are one of our most important products in terms of poundage, profit margin, and popularity with customers. Consumers are increasingly recognizing the sustainability of our salmon fishery and quality of our cohos.

I fish for salmon throughout Southeast Alaska. Salmon are an important component of all other Southeast Alaska community economies. Several of our most rural fishing ports – from the historic fishing villages of Pelican and Elfin Cove to the Alaska native villages of Yakutat and Hoonah - are even more dependent on salmon fisheries for resident earnings in fishing and processing.

TELL THEM ABOUT TONGASS WATERSHEDS

Roadless watersheds in the Tongass National Forest produce salmon that are critical to the well-being of our troll fishery, to the coho salmon and for a number of small-boat net fisheries in the region that also target pinks and sockeye salmon. We have seen significant fluctuations in salmon returns, particularly over the last decade when there were multiple years of low returns due to low productivity in both the marine and freshwater environment.

The Tongass National Forest supports one of the two largest remaining commercial salmon fisheries in the world. Salmon populations elsewhere throughout the Pacific Northwest have declined so much that directed fisheries are no longer supported. Degradation of freshwater spawning and rearing habitat by industrial logging and timber road construction significantly contributed to these population losses.

Over the past half century, clearcutting and timber road construction have harmed habitat for coho and other salmon in many Southeast Alaska watersheds. Rescinding the Roadless Rule will make these populations vulnerable to adverse impacts of clearcutting and logging roads at a time when some salmon populations are declining and are in need of intact habitat as a buffer while they adapt to changing environmental conditions.

I harvest coho salmon mostly along Southeast Alaska's outer coast; however, the coho I catch can come from virtually any watershed throughout the region. In other words, *every stream system is important*. Smaller streams in island ecosystems and the larger mainland rivers are all part of our coho "portfolio." Because population productivity can vary from year to year, maintaining intact roadless watersheds as part of our salmon portfolio is essential to buffering our fisheries.

In conclusion, as a Southeast Alaska commercial fisherman, I request that you retain Roadless Rule protections on the Tongass National Forest. The impacts of clearcutting and logging road construction in roadless areas reduce and/or destroy critical habitat features for salmon. Further declines in productivity could cause periods of fishery closures, risking the viability of hundreds of Alaska resident-owned small fishing businesses, Southeast Alaska salmon processors, and the communities and support businesses that rely on the salmon economy.