

February 23, 2016

**Contact:**

Mark Kaelke, Southeast Alaska Project Director,  
Trout Unlimited, mkaelke@tu.org, (907) 321-4464  
Austin Williams, Alaska Director of Law and Policy,  
Trout Unlimited, awilliams@tu.org, (907) 227-1590  
Keegan McCarthy, Coastal Alaska Adventures/Custom Alaska Cruises, (907) 723-3006



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Thousands of Southeast Alaskans support protections for high-value salmon waters in Tongass National Forest**

*Sportsmen and businesses support prioritizing fish & wildlife in the country's largest National Forest during a 90-day public comment period*

JUNEAU, ALASKA – More than 3,500 fishermen, sportsmen and salmon advocates throughout Southeast Alaska, and 7,300 supporters from elsewhere in Alaska and beyond have called on the U.S. Forest Service to conserve high-value fish and wildlife habitat within the Tongass National Forest during a 90-day comment period held by the Agency, which culminated yesterday.

The U.S. Forest Service is amending the Tongass Land Management Plan, which serves as the blueprint for how the forest must be managed. Thousands of southeast Alaskans saw this as an opportunity to raise conservation standards for important fish and wildlife habitat that are the foundation of the region's fishing and tourism economies, which each contribute \$1 billion annually to the local economy.

“While we have concerns about the proposed plan, we also are excited at the prospect of an amendment that will bring the plan into better alignment with the needs of the region and facilitate a more rapid transition out of large-scale old-growth logging,” said Austin Williams, Alaska Director of Law and Policy at Trout Unlimited. “Identifying high-value fish and wildlife habitat, including Tongass 77 watersheds, as not suitable for timber production would be a significant step toward placing fish and wildlife on a more even footing with traditional extractive industries, and is far overdue.”

Thousands of others across the region commended the Forest Service and Tongass Advisory Committee for recognizing the importance of salmon to the Tongass.

"This is change for the better," said Southeast hunting guide Keegan McCarthy, owner of Coastal Alaska Adventures and Custom Alaska Cruises. "This gives the U.S. Forest Service the opportunity to prioritize these high-value watersheds for the production of salmon, and salmon are one of the key species for nearly every aspect of tourism and recreation in southeast Alaska. Without salmon, my business would not be able to operate. Our livelihoods and the future of our families depend on these watersheds and the multiple sustainable uses they provide."

A diverse group of more than one thousand businesses and individuals that rely on wild salmon and trout for their livelihoods agree it is time to shift priorities in the Tongass National Forest to ensure that top fish-producing watersheds are managed for fish first.

“We are thrilled to see such a strong contingent of southeast Alaskans call for protecting the Tongass 77 areas. These waters present a rich opportunity for fish and fish-based businesses to thrive within the Forest today and for generations to come,” said Mark Kaelke, Trout Unlimited’s Southeast Alaska Project Director.

The Tongass is the nation’s largest National Forest, producing tens of millions of wild salmon each year that support commercial and sport fishing industries that account for 10% of all regional employment and are worth \$1 billion annually. While the majority of Southeast Alaska salmon and trout streams are healthy, threats from ill-conceived timber projects, roads, mining, and initiatives to privatize large swaths of the Tongass are still a concern in these productive salmon waters.

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*Trout Unlimited is the nation’s oldest and largest coldwater fisheries conservation organization. In Alaska, we work with sportsmen and women to ensure the state’s trout and salmon resources remain healthy far into the future through our local chapters and offices in Anchorage and Juneau. Follow TU’s Tongass efforts on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and visit us online at [tu.org](#). Learn more about our work to conserve key areas of the Tongass National Forest at [www.americansalmonforest.org](#)*