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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Trout Unlimited commends the Forest Service for releasing proposed plan that includes protections for high-value salmon rivers**

*Sportsmen and business owners encourage and support a priority shift in country's largest National Forest*

JUNEAU, ALASKA – Fishermen, sportsmen and salmon advocates throughout Southeast Alaska are calling on the Forest Service to conserve high-value fish and wildlife habitat within the Tongass National Forest. Today, the Forest Service released a draft environmental impact statement and a proposed Forest Plan, which kicks off a 90-day period where the public can provide input on how it wants the Forest Service to manage Southeast Alaska's 17 million acre Tongass National Forest.

The Forest Plan amendment, which serves as a blueprint for how the forest must be managed, presents a significant opportunity for the Forest Service to raise conservation standards for important fish and wildlife habitat that support the base of Southeast Alaska's fishing and tourism economy. Scientists and Southeast Alaska stakeholders identified more than 70 watersheds within the Tongass, referred to as the "Tongass 77 Proposal," that span 1.9 million acres and are the region's key salmon-producing watersheds that are currently open for development.

"While it's clear we need to roll up our sleeves and work to make this the plan live up to its potential, we would like to commend the Forest Service, the Tongass Advisory Committee and the people of Southeast Alaska for recognizing that at its heart, the Tongass is a salmon forest," said Mark Kaelke, Southeast Alaska Program Director for Trout Unlimited. "This amendment gives us the opportunity to put fish and other renewable resources values on a more even footing with timber for the first time, and to chart a sustainable future for our greatest national forest. Commercial fishermen, business owners, conservationists and sport anglers are looking forward to weighing in with the Forest Service to provide substantial conservation measures for the areas within the Tongass 77 and other important areas that are critical to salmon and trout."

A [diverse group of more than one thousand businesses and individuals](#) that rely on wild salmon

and trout for their livelihoods agree it's time to shift priorities in the Tongass National Forest to ensure that top fish-producing watersheds are managed for fish first.

“As someone who lives in Southeast Alaska and supports my family off salmon and trout, I know conserving these high-value waters makes economic sense,” said Matt Boline, a fishing guide at Juneau's Bear Creek Outfitters. “The Tongass 77 areas are invaluable for the abundant fish and wildlife they produce and they're places where I take my clients to experience the best of what Alaska has to offer.”

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.

“A diverse and growing segment of Americans recognize the Tongass National Forest is a huge salmon factory, and that key rivers and their surrounding lands should be conserved and managed with fish as priority number one,” said Kaelke. “Currently only 35 percent of the salmon habitat in the Tongass is protected. That's not good enough. Our fish-based businesses, and future generations deserve better. We applaud the Forest Service for making this strong statement in favor of wild salmon and to making good on its promise to transition to more sustainable and diverse management of the forest during this plan amendment process.”

Individuals may weigh-in on the proposed Tongass Forest Plan amendment using the online form at [www.AmericanSalmonForest.org](http://www.AmericanSalmonForest.org) from now through Feb. 22, 2016.

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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](http://tu.org). Learn more about our work to conserve key areas of the Tongass National Forest at [www.americansalmonforest.org](http://www.americansalmonforest.org)*