



Congress... Meet Tongass

by Geoff Mueller

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Washington D.C.—rife with politicians and paved with legislative hurdles—is a far cry from the AK backcountry. But that hasn't stopped Juneau-based flyfishing guide Matt Boline from ditching waders, donning a suit, and entering the melee.

Earlier this week Boline traveled to the nation's capital as part of a commercial and sport fishermen delegation pressing Congress to enact stronger protections for salmon and trout in the country's largest national forest. The Tongass NF is located in southeast Alaska, home to one of the world's largest and healthiest wild salmon fisheries. Currently, 65-percent of salmon and trout habitat in the Tongass is not protected at the watershed level.

"We fish several of the streams in the Tongass 77 proposal," Boline said from his hotel room in D.C. "We fish them for the same reason they're part of the effort, because they're unique and special streams, with varying and distinct genetics from river to river."

Boline, who guides for Bear Creek Outfitters, has been a vocal proponent for area fisheries and was involved in the filming of Detonation Studio's *The Last Salmon Forest* documentary, released last summer. As an integral member

of the Trout Unlimited-led Tongass 77 delegation, the goal is to permanently conserve 1.9 million acres of high-value salmon and trout habitat in the Tongass and make fish and wildlife the top management priority. According to TU, these 77 watersheds are currently open to logging, road building, and privatization that can harm fish.

"These are mostly intact systems and there are only a handful of streams in the proposal that have been logged at all," Boline said. "Ultimately we don't want them to end up like the Columbia. We don't want to see the same mistakes we've made in the Pacific Northwest in terms of having to retroact protections to fix what we've broke.

"The goal is to fix it before we break it."

Southeast AK's salmon and trout contribute an estimated \$1 billion to the regional economy and support 1 in 10 jobs, according to the U.S. Forest Service. The Tongass National Forest produces on average 28-percent of Alaska's annual commercial salmon catch from less than five-percent of the state's land base. Some 70-percent of wild salmon harvested from national forests originate in the Tongass.

"It's estimated that almost 7,300 people in Southeast are employed because of salmon and trout. I'm one of them. As a flyfishing guide I make my living taking anglers to some of the best salmon fishing spots left in the world. I support the Tongass 77 because it makes economic and biological sense," Boline said.

The delegation will meet with several congressional offices and administration officials during the course of the week. For more info, click: americansalmonforest.org.