

My Turn: Protect the Tongass National Forest

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By [BRENT WARREN](#)

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I have fished and crabbed for over 10 years, from Bristol Bay to Southeast Alaska. Fishing is my job, but unlike most people, I love what I do.

When I get up in the morning (that is if I get to sleep at night), I am happy to go to work. The age-old task of harvesting the ocean's bounty to bring fish to families' tables from here to Tokyo brings me nothing but joy, and also sore hands. To have the privilege to harvest these watersheds should not just be protected for myself but for my children and my grandchildren as well. It is not just fishermen's job to protect this resource — it is the nation's job to protect a national forest.

As a fisherman, I know first-hand how important it is to conserve salmon habitat here in the Tongass. I depend on healthy and productive watersheds in the Tongass and without them, my job could be at risk, along with 25 percent of jobs that are tied to fishing and recreation in the region.

A public comment period recently opened for the U.S. Forest Service's review of the Tongass Land Management Plan. It is vital during this time for fishermen and community members who rely on salmon, whether for sustainability, a career or our economy to encourage increased efforts to conserve the most productive watersheds here in the Tongass.

Currently, only 35 percent of salmon habitat in the Tongass is protected. If we want our fisheries to continue to thrive, we have to prioritize protecting the areas of Southeast Alaska that provide nearly a quarter of Alaska's overall salmon catch.

Fishing here in Southeast Alaska is a way of life, and I urge the U.S. Forest Service to take that into consideration as they review the Tongass Land Management Plan.

It is because of healthy waters in the Tongass that I am able to fish commercially and fill my freezer with salmon that feed my family and friends, no matter the time of year. As I am sure everyone knows, salmon spawning habitat is not only fragile but its ranges have drastically decreased.

For thousands of years healthy salmon have run as far south as the San Joaquin River in central California. Now, you have to look as far north as the Tongass National Forest and its watersheds to find truly healthy salmon spawning grounds.

We should all ask ourselves not only how important, but how rare is the resource that is our backyard. For each of our families and all the families it feeds, we need to protect the Tongass National Forest.

- Brent Warren is a commercial fisherman in Juneau.

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