



AK fishermen push Congress for watershed protection legislation for Tongass salmon, trout

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A delegation of commercial and sport fishermen and tour operators asked Congress in mid-March to make the nation's largest national forest safer habitat for salmon and trout.

The delegation visited with members of Congress the week of March 11, asking them to support a legislative proposal called the Tongass 77.

The 17-million acre Tongass National Forest is home to one of the world's largest and healthiest wild salmon fisheries, yet some 65 percent of salmon and trout habitat in the Tongass is not protected at the watershed scale, said officials with Trout Unlimited, who sponsored the delegation.

If enacted into law, the Tongass 77 would permanently conserve at the watershed scale some 1.9 million acres of high value salmon and trout habitat on the Tongass National Forest and make fish and wildlife the highest management priority in these watersheds.

These 77 watersheds are currently open to development activities including logging, road building and privatization that can harm fish.

The Tongass 77 proposal grew from extensive research and collaboration among scientists, fishermen, conservationists, and land management agencies, according to Trout Unlimited. The 77 high-value watersheds they identified, comprising some 1.9 million acres, are currently open to activities that can adversely affect fish, and the best use of these watersheds should be for the production of salmon and trout, Trout Unlimited officials said.

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