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March 13, 2026

Submitted electronically:

<https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=64039>

Monique Nelson, Forest Supervisor
Tongass National Forest- USDA Forest Service
648 Mission Street, Suite 110
Federal Building
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Dear Monique Nelson:

The Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA), the leading statewide trade association for the travel and tourism industry representing over 630 member businesses, appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Tongass National Forest Land Management Plan Revision.

Since the current plan was adopted in 1997, Southeast Alaska's economy has evolved significantly, with tourism emerging as one of the region's most important and sustainable economic drivers. As the Forest Service evaluates future management strategies, it is important to recognize the role the Tongass plays in supporting this important sector.

Tourism is a cornerstone of Alaska's statewide economy supporting 48,000 jobs and generating \$5.6 billion in total economic output annually, with visitors spending roughly \$3.9 billion directly at Alaska businesses each year. In Southeast Alaska, tourism has become the largest private-sector employer, supporting more than 8,000 jobs and roughly \$350 million in wages and earnings. These jobs span a wide range of businesses, including guiding operations, transportation providers, lodges, cruise operators, restaurants, retail, and cultural attractions that depend on the natural resources and landscapes of the Tongass.

This represents a significant shift from the regional economy of the late 1990s. At that time, timber and resource extraction dominated Southeast Alaska's economic landscape. Today, the region's economy is far more diversified, with tourism representing roughly one in five jobs in Southeast Alaska.

Scenic landscapes and wildlife viewing opportunities are among the top attractants for visitors to Alaska, assets which the Tongass National Forest features throughout Southeast. We urge the Forest Service to keep these natural qualities in mind and to consider a balanced approach where tourism and resource development can co-exist across the region.

Alaska Travel Industry Association
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Specific investments in tourism infrastructure will provide valuable returns for the Forest Service and communities of the region. In particular, increased permitting and visitor management at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center remains a priority for the tourism industry. Increased outfitter permitting opportunities across the Forest will also provide a chance to disperse visitors and increase recreation and commerce. Maintaining appropriate staffing levels across all recreation roles such as trail crews, cabin crews, wilderness rangers, and interpretation staff will also better support tourism and perpetuate a cycle of strong, vibrant economic activity.

As the Forest Service updates the Tongass Land Management Plan, it is essential that recreation access, maintenance of natural landscapes, and visitor infrastructure remain key considerations. Thoughtful management of these resources will ensure the Tongass continues to support local businesses, provide employment opportunities, and sustain Southeast Alaska's growing visitor economy for decades to come.

Thank you for considering the importance of tourism in this planning process.

Sincerely,



Josh Howes, Premier Alaska Tours
Chair, ATIA Board of Directors



Jillian Simpson
President & CEO