



October 26, 2020

Sonny Perdue
 Secretary of Agriculture
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
 Washington, DC 20250

Vicki Christiansen
 Chief of Forest Service
 U.S. Forest Service
 1400 Independence Avenue SW,
 Washington, DC 20250

Re: Proposed Exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Dear Secretary Perdue and Chief Christiansen:

The undersigned 72 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, local business leaders, and elected officials from Washington State, are writing to express our disappointment with the U.S. Forest Service's proposed Alaska Roadless Rule and associated Final Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed management plan would open vast tracts of America's remaining ancient forest to logging and road building.

The Tongass is the world's largest remaining intact coastal temperate rainforest and stores more climate-disrupting pollution in its old growth forests and rich soils than any other national forest in the United States – earning its name,

“America's Climate Forest.” As much as 12% of the nation’s stored carbon in National Forests is stored within the Tongass National Forest. Logging and roadbuilding release the stored carbon into the atmosphere at a time when we need to be cutting our emissions drastically to prevent full blown climate chaos.

Roadless area protections sustain southeast Alaska’s ancient forests including thousand-year old Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and western red cedar. Tribal communities currently rely on the Tongass for traditional uses that date back thousands of years and support communities’ essential food security. The Tongass is also home to endemic species including brown bears, wolves, eagles, black-tailed deer, and world-class salmon habitat that support commercial and recreational fisheries. It is also home to incredible outdoor recreation opportunities like mountaineering and sea kayaking.

The Tongass National Forest is federal land owned by all Americans and its management matters beyond just Alaska. Here in Washington State, more than most areas, we have a direct connection to Southeast Alaska in many ways. The Tongass National Forest is approximately 500 miles from the northern border of Washington State, the same distance as Boise, ID. Washington is the closest state to Alaska and shares close business, economic and cultural connections. Seattle is the home port for numerous cruise ships heading north through the Alaska Panhandle to Glacier Bay National Park, immediately adjacent to threatened forest roadless areas.

We share a rich cultural connection to salmon inspired by our local Tribes and natural history similar to our northern Alaska neighbors. The Tongass National Forest produces on average 28% of Alaska’s annual commercial salmon catch, and 25% of the entire west coast annual harvest. A significant number of commercial fishing permits held in Southeast and offshore waters in Alaska have their home port in Washington State in places like Seattle’s Fisherman’s Terminal or Westport on the Olympic coast.

In an August 2019, letter to your office, Southeast Alaska fishermen and fisherwomen urged the Forest Service to select an alternative that broadly protects fish habitat, continues the phase-out of industrial scale old growth clear-cutting, and prioritizes the restoration of degraded watersheds and streams.

Recently, nine tribal governments filed an APA petition to commence a rulemaking process, in collaboration with the Tribes of Southeast Alaska, to create a Traditional Homelands Conservation Rule that protects the traditional and customary uses and areas of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples in the Tongass National Forest.

Instead, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service are proposing a complete lifting of the roadless rule that would result in renewed large-scale logging and adverse impacts to Indigenous peoples as well as negative impacts to the tourism and seafood industries of Southeast Alaska.

Please stop the rollback of the important 2001 National Roadless Rule in Alaska and protect the Tongass National Forest!

Sincerely,

Christine Rolfes
Senator
Washington State Senate (Dist 23)

Alex Ramel
Representative
Washington State Senate (Dist 40)

Jamie Pedersen
Senator
Washington State Senate (Dist 43)

Satpal S Sidhu
County Executive
Whatcom County

Senator Liz Lovelett
Senator
Washington State Senate (Dist 40)

Todd Donovan
Council member
Whatcom County

Claudia Balducci
Councilmember
King County Council

Jeanne Kohl-Welles
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