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Members of U.S. Congress Ask Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Hastings to Protect the Tongass National Forest

WASHINGTON – Nearly 60 members of Congress sent a letter to Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick J. Rahall, II, (D-WV) and Ranking Member Doc Hastings (R-WA) urging them to protect the Tongass National Forest. The letter, spearheaded by Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), urges Representatives Rahall and Hastings not to include H.R. 2099, the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization Act, otherwise known as the “Sealaska bill,” in any public lands omnibus package.

“Since 2001, when I first introduced the Alaska Rainforest Conservation Act, my goal has been to help strike a delicate balance between all of the competing interests in the Tongass National Forest while also preserving this great natural treasure for generations to come,” said Congresswoman DeLauro. “I am concerned about the ecological impact of the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization Act on the Tongass and believe it should be considered on its own merits and not tucked away in a public lands package.”

The controversial Sealaska bill proposes to transfer high-value public lands in the Tongass National Forest to the Sealaska Regional Corporation for the purposes of clear-cut logging and other development. The lands targeted by the proposed legislation contain old-growth trees approximately ten times more valuable than the forest-wide average. Sealaska, which does not need H.R. 2099 to resolve its remaining land selection under current law, is leveraging this bill in order to access the best of the best old-growth forest.

“This bill goes far beyond the original Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and is rightly opposed by the many cities, communities and conservation groups that it would affect,” said U.S. Representative Raúl Grijalva. “This kind of partisan gimmick has no place in an omnibus lands package, and I’m happy to lead opposition to it. These lands are protected for a reason, and opening them to development now without justification would be a huge mistake.”

The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska is a world-class natural treasure – and it belongs to all of us. It is one of the last natural forests of its kind that is still intact and teeming with wildlife, salmon, and old-growth trees. Finalizing Sealaska’s claims are a high priority, but should be balanced with conservation for the unique places within the Tongass, as well as meet the needs of the local communities whose livelihoods depend upon the forest.



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“We applaud Reps. DeLauro (D-CT) and Grijalva and their congressional colleagues for taking a leadership stance on the Tongass National Forest.” said Laurie Cooper, Rainforest Program Director. “Their action highlights that the Tongass is valued as a gem of our national forest system. Not surprisingly, the idea of advancing the Sealaska legislation, which fails to deliver a balanced solution for the Tongass, falls flat with many Members of Congress.”

To view the letter, [click here](#).

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