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Bill Seeks to Gut Roadless-Rule Protections in Alaska Threatens tourism, fishing and wildlife in America's last great rainforests

Today, the Alaska Congressional delegation introduced legislation to exempt the Tongass and Chugach National Forests in Alaska from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule). The Roadless Rule currently protects 9.3 million acres in the Tongass and 5.6 million acres in the Chugach – areas that include vital watersheds, critical salmon habitat, and old-growth trees – from logging and other road-building activities. This legislation is a departure from the March 2011 federal court decision that called the past exemption of the Tongass from the Roadless Rule “arbitrary and capricious.”

The Tongass and Chugach are America's two largest coastal temperate rainforests, encompassing 22 million acres of some of our nation's most high-value lands and waters. These forests are home to centuries-old trees, and provide critical habitat where wolves, grizzly bears, wild salmon, bald eagles, and other wildlife thrive. The Tongass and Chugach are also powerful economic drivers for the region – they support sustainable long-term jobs such as the fishing and tourism industry, which are at odds with industrial-scale logging and road-building threats from the Roadless Rule.

Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) introduced the bill in the Senate, and Representative Don Young (R-AK) introduced legislation in the House. Senator Lisa Murkowski co-sponsored the Senate bill.

"The Roadless Rule is one of the most important public lands policies that protects vital watersheds, critical habitat for salmon and wildlife, and supports the top economic drivers of the region – tourism and commercial fishing industries. The Tongass and Chugach National Forests in Alaska represents our largest remaining temperate rainforest in the world," said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of the Alaska Wilderness League, "We call upon Congress to stop this attack on one of America's greatest national treasures."

Commercial fishing and tourism are by far the largest private employers in the Tongass and Chugach. Protecting these roadless areas in Alaska not only helps these industries, it also makes fiscal sense.

According to taxpayer watchdog group, Taxpayers for Common Sense, "The Tongass timber program has been hemorrhaging money—and jobs—for years. Since 1982, the Tongass timber program has lost nearly one billion dollars. That equates to nearly \$40 million on average every year."



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Much of this expense was due to the taxpayer paying for roads in remote roadless areas to the benefit of just a few timber companies.

“This bill makes absolutely no sense for Americans. It threatens vital habitat for salmon, bears, and other wildlife, which southeast Alaskans rely upon for their living,” said Carol Cairnes, President of the Tongass Conservation Society. “These are our public lands and we should have a say in how they are managed. The American taxpayer will not only lose a national treasure, but will have to foot the bill for timber subsidies. It’s ridiculous.”

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