

August 28, 2013

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Tidwell,

Welcome to southeast Alaska and the Tongass National Forest, the place we call home and where we earn our living in the tourism industry.

We find it unfortunate that Secretary Vilsack's recent memorandum on the future of the Tongass places an inordinately large focus on the timber industry, while rarely mentioning the largest private sector industry in southeast Alaska: tourism. It's time the Forest Service shifts its focus in a meaningful way towards the transition away from old-growth logging while recognizing the importance of tourism as a long-term, sustainable growth industry. More than 1 million visitors travel to the Tongass each year to experience its beauty. The nearly \$1 billion tourism economy provides 20 percent of southeast Alaska's jobs, and relies upon visitors being able to experience the Tongass in its natural state.

The focus on the timber industry seems at odds with the broader initiative announced by the Secretary in May 2010, which lays out a vision for economic diversification within southeast communities. Part of that diversification includes tourism.

Regrettably, while the tourism industry continues to grow, Forest Service budgets and staff for its recreation program have been on the decline. The recreation program provides needed services to the tourism industry including special use permit administration and trail and cabin maintenance. The Forest Service must adjust its priorities and budget to more adequately support growing and sustainable industries in the Tongass, like tourism.

Sincerely,

Alaska Coastal Quest
Ketchikan, AK

Blue Heron B&B
Gustavus, AK

Expedition Broker
Haines, AK

All Aboard Yacht Charters
Union, WA

Bluewater Adventures
North Vancouver, BC

F.I.S.H.E.S.
Hoonah, AK

Baranof Wilderness Lodge
Sitka, AK

Discover Skagway
Skagway, AK

Fishing Bear Charters
Tenakee, AK

Black Bear Inn
Ketchikan, AK

Dolphin Charters
El Cerrito, CA

Glacier Bay Sea Kayaks
Gustavus, AK

Gustavus Inn
Gustavus, AK

Hollis Adventure Rental
Craig, AK

Latitude Adventures
Sitka, AK

Leonard's Landing
Lodge
Yakutat, AK

McCormick Charters
Skagway, AK

Naha Bay Outdoor
Adventures
Ketchikan, AK

Pacific Catalyst II Inc.
Friday Harbor, WA

River House Vacation
Rentals
Haines, AK

Sockeye Cycle Co.
Haines, AK

Southeast Alaska
Outdoor Adventures
Sitka, AK

Tok River Outfitters LLC
Hoonah, AK

Weather Permitting
Alaska LLC
Juneau, AK