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Cantwell bill would ensure protection of millions of acres of America's national forests

Washington – Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) has [introduced a bill](#) in the U.S. Senate that would codify into law the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This agency rule currently protects more than 58 million acres of roadless national forests, including America's two largest – the Chugach National Forest in south central Alaska and the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. The Roadless Rule is the result of one of the most extensive public processes in U.S. history – more than 1.6 million people submitted comments on the rule, 95% of which supported roadless protections.

Wild public lands like the Tongass National Forest work for Alaska's sustainable economies, but efforts to carve it up for private gain have been pushed throughout the 115th Congress. In particular, ongoing efforts to repeal roadless protections in Alaska's national forests simply makes no sense. Timber sales in Southeast Alaska are not economically viable without large public subsidization, and further depleting Tongass old-growth forest threatens billion-dollar (and sustainable) industries like tourism, outdoor recreation and commercial fishing that provide thousands of jobs and continue to grow.

Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

"We applaud Senator Cantwell and all who have signed on as cosponsor to this simple, common sense bill to safeguard the most cherished areas of our national forests. The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska supports billion dollar fishing and tourism industries and is home to iconic American wildlife like bald eagles and brown bears. We must ensure that these economic, wildlife and wilderness values are protected.

Unfortunately, Alaska's congressional delegation seems more interested in returning to the days of old-growth clearcutting than they do on working to build a sustainable, long-term future for Southeast Alaska. They have introduced bills that would transfer to the state of Alaska or privatize more than 2.5 million acres of our nation's most iconic national forest. Add to that the fact that the state of Alaska has petitioned the Forest Service for a roadless waiver and the result is new old-growth clearcutting that would require millions in taxpayer subsidies.

Senator Cantwell's bill lays out a positive vision for our national forests that protects inventoried roadless areas while providing for community access, hydropower projects and utility connectors that serve a legitimate public interest. This is the kind of approach that will strengthen the outdoor economy, and maintain the health of our national forests and the communities and wildlife that depend on them."

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