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Omnibus bill advances free of harmful Tongass Riders

WASHINGTON – Today, Congress introduced an omnibus spending bill free from riders that would substantially weaken protections for America’s largest national forest, the Tongass National Forest. The withdrawn riders would have repealed long-standing protections for old-growth forests by exempting the Tongass from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule and undoing the transition away from old-growth logging contained in the Tongass Land Management Plan.

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

“The Tongass isn’t out of the woods just yet, but Congress removing harmful riders that would have taken Paul Bunyan’s ax to centuries-old trees in America’s largest rainforest is a positive step. Congress owes the American public a good faith funding bill that keeps the government open and running, and it’s good to see Democrats stand strong to keep harmful Tongass riders from gumming up the process. The transition away from old-growth logging is critical to the future of the Tongass, and we urge the Forest Service to focus instead on building a long-term, sustainable economy in Southeast Alaska.

The Tongass is the crown jewel of our National Forest System. It is a destination for tourism, fishing and outdoor recreation, and home to some of the last stands of temperate old-growth forest in the world. And old-growth forests and their ability to store carbon remain an important and under-recognized tool in the battle to combat climate change

The current Tongass management plan reflects a consensus among Southeast Alaska stakeholders regarding the need to transition away from destructive Tongass old-growth clearcutting. The Roadless Rule is the result of one of the most extensive public processes in U.S. history. Undoing these protections would put at risk millions of acres of national forest in the Tongass and cost taxpayers millions in the process.

The news isn’t all positive for Alaska, however, and clean air for Alaskans shouldn’t be a bargaining chip to fund the government. Damaging important clean air protections established by EPA to address toxic pollution will expose communities and families to increased risks of cancer, heart disease, stroke and other serious illnesses.”

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