

For Immediate Release
December 16, 2019

Contacts:

Corey Himrod, **Alaska Wilderness League**, (202) 266-0426, corey@alaskawild.org
Katherine Quaid, **WECAN International**, (541) 325-1058, katherine@wecaninternational.org
Randi Spivak, **Center for Biological Diversity**, (310) 779-4894, rspivak@biologicaldiversity.org
Gabby Brown, **Sierra Club**, (914) 261-4626, gabby.brown@sierraclub.org
Meredith Trainor, **Southeast Alaska Conservation Council**, 907-957-8347 meredith@seacc.org
Gwen Dobbs, **Defenders of Wildlife**, (202) 772-0269, gdobbs@defenders.org
Chelsi Moy, **The Wilderness Society**, (406) 240-3013, cmoy@twc.org
Rebecca Bowe, **Earthjustice**, (415) 217-2093, rbowe@earthjustice.org
Anne Hawke, **Natural Resources Defense Council**, (646) 823-4518, ahawke@nrdc.org

400,000-plus Blast Trump Administration Plan for Old-growth Clearcutting in Alaska's Tongass National Forest

JUNEAU, *Alaska*— More than 400,000 people and [dozens](#) of local tribal, government, business and national recreation groups have flooded the [U.S. Forest Service](#) with comments opposing its plan to undo safeguards that prevent clearcutting and road building in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. The comment period ends Tuesday.

The Trump administration wants to [gut longstanding protections](#) for the nation's largest national forest. This old-growth, temperate rainforest in Southeast Alaska is the homeland of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people. [Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians](#) and the [National Congress of American Indians](#), along with [numerous Southeast Alaska tribes and villages](#), including the Organized Village of Kake, have passed resolutions supporting the Roadless Rule.

The cities of Sitka and Skagway have also passed resolutions condemning the Forest Service plan to roll back the [Roadless Rule](#), which protects more than 9 million acres of the Tongass from development. The [broad-based opposition](#) also includes the Outdoor Alliance and Conservation Alliance, representing outdoor recreationists and some of the country's largest outdoor retail and recreation businesses. Here is a list of [tribal and city governments, business and recreation groups, and elected officials](#) that support the Roadless Rule.

"The push for a full exemption to the Roadless Rule for Alaska has always been just pretext for continuing to subsidize Southeast Alaska's dwindling old-growth timber industry," **said Andy Moderow, Alaska director at Alaska Wilderness League.** "Instead of asking taxpayers to foot the bill for more hefty logging subsidies, the Forest Service should be addressing maintenance backlogs and permitting issues that will benefit tourism and recreation, or stream restoration that will boost Southeast's billion-dollar fishing industry and support the region's wildlife."

The Tongass serves as a buffer against climate change and as a refuge for salmon, birds and other wildlife. Much like the trees of the Amazon rainforest, the Tongass's stands of ancient trees are

champions at absorbing greenhouse gas emissions. The Tongass stores approximately 8 percent of the total carbon stored in all national forests.

“For decades, industrial-scale logging has been destroying this precious ecosystem and disrupting the life-ways of the region’s indigenous peoples and local communities. At this critical time of the world plunging into a climate crisis, we must stand with indigenous peoples and Southeast Alaskans who have spoken out clearly and ceaselessly to maintain the Roadless Rule,” **said Osprey Orielle Lake, executive director of Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network.** “Our national forests are essential lungs of the Earth.”

More than 1.5 million Americans voiced support for the roadless rule during the original rulemaking process, which followed decades of clearcutting that had a destructive and lasting impact on the Tongass and other national forests. The rule continues to receive overwhelming support in Alaska and across the nation.

“Alaska’s top politicians are subverting the interests of their constituents and the rest of the country to prop up a few logging mills,” **said Randi Spivak, public lands director at the Center for Biological Diversity.** “The public is demanding that this spectacular national forest remain protected for their children and grandchildren. We’ve seen the devastation that comes from clearcutting old-growth forests and we must safeguard this forest’s crucial role in slowing the rate of climate change.”

Logging the Tongass would threaten the health of Alaskan salmon by polluting rivers and streams, as well as by removing trees that help regulate water temperature. Current roadless-rule protections also extend to cultural and sacred sites of great importance to Alaska Native people, who rely upon the Tongass for spiritual and subsistence practices.

“The Tongass and its century-old trees represent more than a national forest. It’s a way to combat a warming planet, nourishes an economy that relies on these trees standing, and is one of the last intact rainforests in the world,” **said Josh Hicks, roadless defense campaign manager at The Wilderness Society.** “The superlatives to describe the Tongass are endless. It’s mind-boggling that anyone would propose to cut these old-growth trees down.”

The landmark 2001 [Roadless Area Conservation Rule](#) protects more than 58 million acres of roadless national forest lands across the country. Weakening this policy in Alaska will harm local and indigenous communities, Southeast Alaska’s economy, salmon fisheries and wildlife.

“Hundreds of thousands of Americans have spoken out against the Trump administration's dangerous effort to slash protections for the Tongass National Forest because it would have dangerous, far-reaching effects for our climate and forests nationwide,” **said Kirin Kennedy, deputy legislative director for lands and wildlife at Sierra Club.** “We will not let the Trump administration log away our future.”

The Tongass, America’s largest and wildest national forest, draws outdoor adventurers, boaters, birders, hunters and anglers. An intact Tongass supports a robust Southeast Alaskan economy through tourism, commercial and sport fishing, and small businesses. Its old-growth trees provide irreplaceable wildlife

habitat for myriad species including wild Pacific salmon, Alexander Archipelago wolves and Sitka black-tailed deer.

“The people of Southeast Alaska have spoken: The national Roadless Rule works for Alaskans,” **said Meredith Trainor, executive director of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council**, where the Tongass National Forest is located. “If this process has shown anything, it's that the Alaska delegation is not speaking on behalf of the best interests of Southeast Alaskans, nor the main drivers of our regional economy, which are fishing and tourism. We call on Secretary Perdue to prioritize the voices of Southeast Alaskans over those of the Alaska delegation and the timber lobbyists who have their ear, as he weighs the future of the Roadless Rule in Alaska.”

Recent polling shows that 61 percent of voters nationwide oppose exempting large parts of the Tongass from the roadless rule's protections. A near-unanimous 96 percent believe it is important for the federal government to protect and conserve national forests, including 75 percent who say it is very important.

“Alaskans and Americans overwhelmingly want to see roadless areas within the Tongass National Forest protected,” **said Patrick Lavin, Alaska policy advisor for Defenders of Wildlife**. “Instead, the Trump administration has moved to open our remaining wild lands to logging to benefit private industry. Clearcutting ancient forests is bad for fish and wildlife, bad for the region's tourism and fishing industries, expensive for taxpayers and makes no economic sense. This proposal would bring great destruction and no benefit.”

“The millions of ancient trees across this temperate rainforest serve as the greatest carbon sanctuary in the U.S. national forest system, helping us all as a counterweight against the climate crisis,” **said Blaine Miller-McFeeley, senior legislative representative for policy and legislation at Earthjustice**. “This ecologically rich landscape and critical wildlife habitat will be lost forever if industry is allowed to clear-cut our national forest.”

“The Roadless Rule works, and we need it to save the Tongass. It's a national disgrace that the Trump administration is proposing to use taxpayer dollars to subsidize clearcuts and logging roads in publicly-owned old growth rainforest,” **said Niel Lawrence, Alaska director and senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council**. “As this outpouring of opposition shows, the American people don't support this move. And at a time when the climate crisis dictates we do everything in our power to smartly manage and preserve our carbon-absorbing forests, we should focus on saving--and not trashing--the Roadless Rule.”

###