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June 11, 2021

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Biden administration to address roadless protections in the Tongass National Forest

A full reinstatement of roadless protections is a necessity and crucial to preserving America's 'Amazon' and one of our most valuable assets in the climate fight.

Washington — Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service announced their intent to address the removal of Roadless Rule protections in the Tongass National Forest by repealing or replacing the Alaska Roadless Rule finalized at the end of the previous administration. That administration's effort to open up Tongass roadless areas to road building and logging would have been a huge blow to efforts to combat the climate and biodiversity crises. It also threatened the culture and traditions of the region's Indigenous peoples and the Tongass' abundant wildlife and beautiful scenery.

The Tongass National Forest is the homeland of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people, who rely on the forest and its wildlife and wilderness resources to sustain their lifestyle and cultural traditions. It also plays a critical role in fighting climate change by retaining vast stores of carbon in its old-growth trees. The removal of roadless protections in the Tongass threatens a carbon sink that already stores more than 1.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent and sequesters an additional 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually.

Statement by Andy Moderow, Alaska Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

"Taking an axe to Tongass old-growth protections was among the most reckless and irresponsible of the previous administration's environmental rollbacks. Indigenous communities, hunters and anglers, the tourism and fishing industries, those who care about protecting our planet's biodiversity and climate — all opposed removing roadless protections on the Tongass. We applaud the Biden administration's and the Forest Service's commitment to addressing that rollback, but also want to make clear that a full reinstatement of roadless protections is a necessity and crucial to preserving America's 'Amazon' and one of our most valuable assets in the climate fight.

"The Tongass timber program has been a money pit for federal taxpayers for decades. During the past forty years, the American taxpayer has spent \$1.7 billion subsidizing the industrial clearcutting of our largest national forest. There's no way to justify continuing to spend that kind of money propping up an industry that represents less than 1% of employment in Southeast Alaska, especially when billion-dollar and sustainable industries like tourism and fishing depend on the beautiful scenery and healthy streams and rivers of the Tongass.



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“The Tongass stores more than 1.5 billion metric tons of CO2-eq and sequesters an additional 10 million metric tons each year. We can’t continue to subsidize the destruction of a valuable carbon sink and the benefits it provides, and the Biden administration should be commended for looking forward to the kind of world we want to leave to our kids. The Tongass is an unmatched treasure, and with smart action now we can properly manage it for future generations.”

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Background:

Feedback submitted to the Forest Service on the proposal — from both inside and outside of Alaska — overwhelmingly supported keeping the Roadless Rule in place in the Tongass:

- 96% of public comments received by the Forest Service [opposed lifting roadless protections](#).
- Testimony given at [public meetings](#) and 18 different subsistence hearings in Southeast Alaska saw a ‘vast majority’ of local residents do in fact support keeping the Roadless Rule in place.
- Six Southeast Alaska tribes and six Southeast Alaska city councils* passed resolutions opposing the rollback, and [nine Alaska Native tribes petitioned the USDA directly](#) to keep the rule in place.
- A large coalition of Southeast Alaska Native Tribes and communities, small businesses and conservation organizations [sued the Trump administration](#) over exempting the Tongass National Forest from the federal Roadless Rule.

* City of Skagway, City of Sitka, Community Association of Elfin Cove, Pelican City, City of Tenakee Springs, City of Gustavus, Organized Village of Kake, Organized Village of Saxman, Craig Tribal Association, Organized Village of Kasaan, Ketchikan Indian Community, Skagway Traditional Council.

Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. We honor and respect the cultures of Alaska Natives whose way of life remains deeply connected to the state’s land, waters and wildlife. We believe that Alaska’s long-term economic future and subsistence traditions are inexorably tied to the health and sound stewardship of its natural resources, which support hunting, fishing, tourism and unrivaled outdoor experiences that are central to Alaskans’ quality of life.



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