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Biden administration to take steps to restore Roadless Rule protections in the Tongass

Washington — Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will announce plans to restore protections to more than 9 million acres of roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest and end large-scale old-growth logging in America’s largest national forest. Opening up Tongass roadless areas to road building and logging would be a huge blow to efforts to combat the climate and biodiversity crises. It also threatens the culture and traditions of the region’s Indigenous peoples, as well as the Tongass’ abundant wildlife and beautiful scenery.

The Tongass is the linchpin of Southeast Alaska’s economy, attracting people from around the world for world-class recreation, hunting, and sport and commercial salmon fishing. Increased logging would threaten the region’s tourism and fishing industries — in recent years, visitor industry and seafood-related jobs have accounted for 26 percent of Southeast Alaska employment, with fishing and tourism each generating an annual \$1 billion economic benefit. The timber industry, on the other hand, provides less than 1% of jobs in the Southeast economy.

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

“Old-growth forests are critical to addressing climate change, so restoring roadless protections to the Tongass is critical. The Tongass alone stores more than 1.5 billion metric tons of CO₂-eq and sequesters an additional 10 million metric tons each year. Gutting roadless protections for our nation’s largest and most biologically rich national forest will not only grant American taxpayers the dubious honor of paying hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies for logging road construction, but that money would then fund the destruction of a valuable carbon sink and the benefits it provides in the process.

“With Alaska experiencing climate impacts more acutely than most, we shouldn’t be discussing the continued clearcutting of a natural climate solution that exists right in our own backyard. Alaskans love their old-growth forests and the timber industry in Southeast is a relic of the past, and the Biden administration should be commended for looking forward to what 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.”

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:



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- 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^[ii] passed resolutions opposing the rollback, and [nine Alaska Native tribes petitioned the USDA directly](#) to keep the rule in place.
- The [National Congress of American Indians has just passed a resolution](#) requested by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Southeast Alaska Tribes calling for the reinstatement of Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass National Forest.
- 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.

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^[ii] 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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