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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 18, 2021

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USDA, Forest Service begin the process to restore protections to America's largest national forest

Washington — The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service have announced this evening that they will publish a proposed rule repealing the 2020 Alaska Roadless Rule for public comment early next week. The previous administration removed federal Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska in 2020, leaving it vulnerable to unchecked road construction that would support large-scale industrial logging of ancient trees.

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

“We commend President Biden and Secretary Vilsack in taking steps to restore the faith and trust of Alaskans who recognize that industrial-scale, old-growth logging is a relic of the past in Southeast Alaska. It would be difficult to overstate how flawed the Trump administration’s rulemaking process was that ultimately stripped roadless protections from the Tongass despite widespread opposition in Southeast Alaska and the public at large. 96% of public comments opposed removing federal roadless safeguards. This administration aspires to lead on the international stage in the fight for a livable climate and restoring this critical forest protection will preserve a natural climate solution that benefits communities around the globe.”

“The Tongass is the linchpin of Southeast Alaska’s economy, supporting a \$2 billion sustainable economy and more than one-quarter of jobs in the region. The forest attracts people from around the world for world-class recreation, hunting, and sport and commercial salmon fishing. And it remains as essential now as it has for thousands of years to Indigenous communities that continue to rely on the forest for their cultural and subsistence traditions. We look forward to the upcoming public process and working with the administration to make sure the diverse constituencies of the Tongass are heard and that America’s largest national forest and one of the largest remaining temperate rainforests in the world remains intact.”

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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 unique public comments received by the Forest Service [opposed lifting roadless protections](#).



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- 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^[i] 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 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.

Climate change:

The removal of roadless protections in the Tongass National Forest 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. That’s the equivalent of taking more than 2 million cars off the road each year.

^[i]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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