

**Alaska Wilderness League | Earthjustice | Environment America | Women's Earth and Climate Action Network | Natural Resources Defense Council | Southeast Alaska Conservation Council**

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**Natural Resources Committee to consider strengthening roadless area protections**

Indigenous and conservation groups welcome the hearing, emphasizing the urgency to provide more durable protections for critical areas of national forests

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will hold a hearing on Wednesday to consider the [Roadless Area Conservation Act](#). Introduced in 2021 by Reps. Ruben Gallego of Arizona and Diana DeGette of Colorado, this bill would reinforce the landmark [2001 Roadless Rule](#), which was enacted under the Clinton administration. Indigenous leaders and conservation advocates expressed support for the Roadless Area Conservation Act because it will establish more permanent protections for critical forests, including the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska. More than 90 groups signed a [letter of support](#) for the legislation that was sent to the committee calling for its urgent passage. The Roadless Area Conservation Act would prevent future administrations from removing protections from the Tongass and other national forests. In 2020, the Trump administration removed roadless protection from 9.2 million acres of the Tongass.

The Tongass is integral to the local community, particularly to the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples who have lived in the Tongass for thousands of years. From salmon streams, to hunting and cultural use, tribal traditions depend on a healthy forest.

"The Tongass Forest is my home. Home to the ancient Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian Indigenous Peoples. The air we breathe, the water we depend on, the land we live upon, all pristine. It is a life to cherish. It is a way of living worth fighting for," **said Kashudoha Wanda Loescher Culp (Tlingit), WECAN Tongass coordinator.** "The Biden administration's restoration of the Roadless Rule is vital for protecting our forest homelands as Indigenous peoples of the Tongass. Now we must ensure that the Roadless Rule is codified into law to protect the forest from industrial exploitation, and to ensure it remains standing for current and future generations."

Climate models show that Alaska is warming twice as fast as the rest of the country. However, the [Tongass appears as though it may be a regional exception](#), potentially providing a climate refuge for a multitude of species. The Tongass is responsible for storing the equivalent of 1.5 times the nation's total

greenhouse gas emissions. Nearly all (75%) of that carbon is stored in its productive old-growth rainforests and inventoried roadless areas.\*

“Forests, especially mature and old-growth forests, are a straightforward yet critical climate solution. We must protect them from logging,” **said Ellen Montgomery, Environment America’s Public Lands Campaign director.** “Forests on federal lands sequester 35 million metric tons of carbon from the atmosphere. There is simply no technology that can measure up to forests for carbon removal at this scale.”

The bill would protect almost 60 million total acres of forests from road building and maintenance projects largely designed to accommodate the logging industry, all subsidized by taxpayers. Taxpayers have lost approximately \$600 million on the Tongass timber program since 1999.

“Southeast Alaska’s economy is transitioning toward sustainability because a healthy, vibrant Tongass National Forest can provide for people today and in the future if we don’t trade it for short term gains,” **said Andy Moderow, Alaska director for Alaska Wilderness League.** “We support the Roadless Area Conservation Act. The Roadless Rule protects Tongass old-growth while also allowing for community access, hydropower projects, utility connectors and other economic development projects when they serve a legitimate public interest.”

America’s roadless areas are essential for safeguarding countless species’ habitats, drinking water for millions of Americans and recreation opportunities for hikers, fishers and climbers.

*\* DellaSala, D.A. et al. In press. The Tongass National Forest, Southeast Alaska, USA: A Natural Climate Solution of Global Significance. Land (in press).*

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