

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE OFFICE OF THE SENATE PRESIDENT



North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senate District N

November 5, 2019

Alaska Roadless Rule comments
Ken Tu, Interdisciplinary Team Leader
U.S.D.A Forest Service
PO Box 21628
Juneau, AK 99802-1628

RE: Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas Draft Environmental Impact Statement: SUPPORT for Preferred Alternative 6, exempting the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule

Dear Mr. Tu,

I write in strong support of exempting the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule as reflected in your agency's Preferred Alternative, Alternative 6, in the Alaska Roadless Rule Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Alternative 6 is preferred by your agency, the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (Forest Service); is responsive to the State of Alaska's petition; respects the unique characteristics of the Tongass and the need for unique management; and supports reasonable, responsible resource development and economic activity while protecting the natural environment. The preferred alternative also reflects the State's preference to emphasize rural economic development opportunities, as per the findings of the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity.

The Roadless Rule devastated the Southeast Alaska timber industry, a core economic foundation in that area. The one-size regulations not only damaged the timber industry and the related jobs, but has hurt communities struggling to install roads, renewable power systems and other infrastructure that supports a sustainable way of life in the 32 rural communities of the Tongass. A history of specialized provisions for the Tongass reinforces the need for unique rules: ANILCA, the Tongass Timber Relief Act, and the 2003 exemption from the Roadless Rule.

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I understand the Preferred Alternative 6 would exempt the Tongass from the Roadless Rule, while removing only about 2% of 9.2 million acres designated as roadless areas on the Tongass out of that designation and into the lands group that may be considered for timber harvest. The proposed rule would not authorize any activities on the ground; those would be subject to additional layers of existing management plans and review. Resources development, along with transportation, renewable energy projects, and wastewater/municipal water systems work, would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by local managers and local people.

Responsible resource development has been shown to increase health and longevity for Alaskans in proximity to the activity areas. As reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association, life expectancy in Alaska's North Slope and Northwest Arctic Borough increased by 8 to 13 years between 1980 and 2014. During that same timeframe, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System was built and began transporting oil from Prudhoe Bay, which is in the North Slope Borough, to Valdez in 1977. In 1989, the Red Dog Mine opened in the newly created Northwest Arctic Borough and is the largest zinc mine in the world.

Not only did life expectancy increase for the residents of these areas, so did their quality of life. Locals realized better wages and health care, steady employment, and stronger communities. At the same time, Alaskans in these rural areas have continued their cultural tradition of subsistence. Continuing the legacy of responsible resource development by supporting multiple uses in the Tongass National Forest should bring these health and longevity benefits to Southeast Alaskans, too.

I am confident in reviewing the DEIS that Alternative 6 will balance our environmental and cultural wealth with the tangible benefits responsible resource development and access delivers to our people, our communities and our state. I urge the Forest Service to select Alternative 6 and exempt Alaska from the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy Giessel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Cathy Giessel,
Alaska Senate President
Senate District N