



Municipality of Skagway

GATEWAY TO THE KLONDIKE

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY

November 13, 2019

USDA Forest Service
ATTN: Alaska Roadless Rule
P.O. Box 21628
Juneau, AK 99802
akroadlessrule@fs.fed.us

RE: Municipality of Skagway Comments on Alaska Roadless Rule

Thank you for providing the opportunity to offer public comment regarding the Roadless Rule. As a Municipality, Skagway's future depends on the vitality and resplendent natural beauty of the Tongass National Forest. As one of the most visited and highly rated cruise ship destinations in the world, our economy hinges on maintaining the pristine beauty of Southeast Alaska's primeval landscape.

Cruise ship passengers visiting Southeast Alaska rank their experience as one of the best in the entire industry. Many periodicals and websites rank various Southeast Alaska destinations as their number one port of call year after year. High levels of customer satisfaction are maintained because Southeast Alaska delivers on its promise to show visitors something truly wild. What other destination offers such easy access to unspoiled wilderness and vast expanses of uninterrupted natural landscapes?

Cruise ship passengers sail up the Inside Passage marveling at mountains, glaciers, and breaching whales. They can take a flightseeing or hiking tour into the Tongass from Skagway or any other Southeast Alaska port of call and experience something greater than themselves. John Muir wrote, "The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." These words illustrate why visitors fall in love with Southeast Alaska and the Tongass - because they can tap into something untouched and untarnished.

What happens to the visitor experience when our inventoried roadless areas are compromised? Alternative 6 opens the Tongass to clear-cut logging in places where visitors seek communion with nature. Is it possible that supporting the heavily subsidized logging industry will negatively impact the tourism industry? It seems likely.

Why would we seek to destroy the attribute that makes us one of the most sought-after destinations in the world? The damage caused by clearcutting will last generations and the

Tongass will bear these scars long after logging profits are earned and spent. While one could argue that there are economic benefits to logging, when compared to their impact on other industries like tourism, the benefits seem counterproductive.

In Skagway, our economy is almost solely dependent on the health of the cruise ship industry. Skagway is expecting 454 cruise berthings in 2020. Those ships will carry approximately 1.1 million passengers from May through September, making us the 18th most visited cruise ship port of call in the world. Projected industry growth for Skagway is around 3.5 percent to 4 percent annually for the next 20 years.

The population in Skagway is only 1,088, but job numbers soar during the summer tourist season. In 2018, employment in Skagway increased by 329% between January and August, with 1,234 jobs added to the local economy specifically to serve summer visitors and the industries that support them.¹ In the second and third quarters of 2018, local Skagway businesses generated \$162,995,316 in revenue that contributed \$8,149,765.80 in sales tax revenue for the Municipality – 96% of the total annual revenue generated in Skagway.²

As you can see, any impact on the cruise passenger visitor experience, especially one as significant as reversing the Roadless Rule, could have a dire impact on Skagway's economy and Alaska's tourism economy as a whole. Additionally, the United States Department of Agriculture's resources currently being used to pursue Alternative 6 could instead be used to bolster the booming Alaska tourism economy, an industry that does not require taxpayer subsidies.

It is for these reasons that the Skagway Assembly unanimously voted to approve Resolution 19-32R, enclosed as part of this response. Public testimony was unanimously in support of adopting the resolution, which clearly states that the Municipality of Skagway supports Alternative 1 of the USDA's Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Indeed, many of the reasons visitors fall in love with Alaska are the same reasons residents choose to live here. The Tongass is essential to Alaskan independence and the subsistence lifestyle. It quite literally nourishes us - both in body and spirit. And in Skagway, it ensures a robust economy. I urge you to consider the voice of a united Skagway in support of Alternative 1 and protect our economy by ensuring the ongoing natural integrity of the Tongass.

Sincerely,



Andrew Cremata, Mayor

¹ State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis. "Current Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Annual: January to December 2018" (66-67).

<http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/qcew/ee18.pdf>.

² Municipality of Skagway.

Proposed by:	Mayor Cremata
Attorney Review:	10/16/2019
Vote:	5 Aye 0 Nay 1 Absent

MUNICIPALITY OF SKAGWAY, ALASKA
RESOLUTION NO. 19-32R

A RESOLUTION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SKAGWAY, ALASKA EXPRESSING THE MUNICIPALITY OF SKAGWAY'S SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE 1 OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS WITHIN THE TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST.

WHEREAS, the community of Skagway is highly dependent on tourism as its main economic driver; and

WHEREAS, tourism in Skagway, the Inside Passage, and the broader region of Southeast Alaska is dependent on maintaining pristine, wild landscapes of the surrounding coastal temperate rainforest and the iconic wildlife it supports; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) finalized a management plan for the Tongass National Forest, which includes the National Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) in response to disappearing wildlands and a road maintenance backlog of \$8.4 billion; and

WHEREAS, the intent of the Roadless Rule was to protect the social, economic, and ecological values and characteristics of inventoried roadless areas from road construction and reconstruction and certain timber harvest activities; and

WHEREAS, at the time of promulgation in 2001, the Roadless Rule had the most extensive public involvement of any rulemaking process in the history of federal rulemaking, generating over 1.6 million comments, the vast majority of which supported the creation of a strong national policy protecting roadless areas; and

WHEREAS, inventoried roadless areas provide large, relatively undisturbed blocks of important habitat for a variety of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and plants; contribute to healthy watersheds and clean drinking water; and provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism; and

WHEREAS, the Roadless Rule protects some of the last remaining tracts of old-growth forest habitat in the Tongass that contribute to the absorption of global warming pollution and protect native animal species that rely on them; and

WHEREAS, roadless areas support subsistence lifestyles through hunting and fishing, and support outdoor recreation and tourism industries; and

WHEREAS, the Roadless Rule contains a variety of exceptions that allow roadbuilding for community access, hydropower projects, utility connectors, and other economic development projects when they serve a legitimate public interest; and

WHEREAS, protection of these roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest is of local and national importance; and

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WHEREAS, in 2018, the State of Alaska petitioned the USDA to craft a state-specific roadless rule and requested that a full exemption be pursued from the 2001 Roadless Rule; and

WHEREAS, in 2018 the USDA accepted the State of Alaska's petition and initiated a National Environmental Policy Act review, an environmental impact statement (EIS), and public rulemaking process to address the management of inventoried roadless areas within Alaska, and to evaluate the exemption set forth in the petition. The USDA rulemaking is administrative and separate from any action Congress may take; and

WHEREAS, the majority of comments received by the USDA following its notice of intent of proposed rulemaking opposed changing the Roadless Rule for Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the draft EIS provides an analysis of six alternatives related to roadless management in Alaska, ranging from no action to a full exemption from the Roadless Rule on the Tongass National Forest; and

WHEREAS, the USDA has identified Alternative 6, which is a full exemption, as the preferred alternative at this time; and

WHEREAS, the Municipality of Skagway opposes Alternative 6 and feels that Alternative 1, which requests no action and would maintain the 2001 Roadless Rule on the Tongass National Forest, best protects public interests while also protecting the unique ecosystem of the Tongass; and

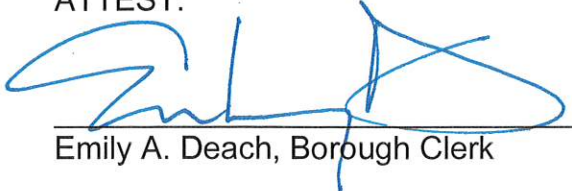
WHEREAS, the USDA is seeking public comment on the draft EIS from October 18, 2019 to December 17, 2019 and will issue its decision regarding and Alaska Roadless Rule in June of 2020;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT: the Skagway Borough Assembly expresses its opposition to Alternative 6, and its support for Alternative 1 of the draft environmental impact statement for the management of inventoried roadless areas within the Tongass National Forest.

PASSED AND APPROVED by a duly constituted quorum of the Borough Assembly of the Municipality of Skagway this 24th day of October, 2019.



Andrew Cremata, Mayor

ATTEST:


Emily A. Deach, Borough Clerk

(SEAL)

