

The cents and sense of maintaining the roadless protections on the Tongass

Dale Bosworth

ANALYSIS/OPINION:

The [U.S. Forest Service](#) is weighing whether to do away with roadless protections on the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. The Tongass no doubt has ecological significance. It is the largest national forest in the country and one of the largest intact temperate rainforests in the world. But all too often, the dollars and cents of a decision like this are overlooked.

Roadless areas make up about a third of the National Forest System, including more than 9 million acres of the Tongass in Alaska. During the second half of the 20th century, national roadless areas were a battleground between conservationists and the logging industry. When the Roadless Conservation Rule was implemented in 2001, it banned most road building and commercial logging in roadless areas. That only poured fuel on forest management battles.

When I was chief of the [U.S. Forest Service](#) during the President George W. Bush administration, there was disagreement and uncertainty with what to do with national forest roadless areas. The federal courts eventually upheld the legality of the Roadless Rule and mostly brought an end to the fracas — except as it pertained to the Tongass National Forest.

Now, at the request of Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy, the [Forest Service](#) is considering a total exemption from the Roadless Rule for the Tongass. Prior to the 1990s, the Tongass yielded significant amounts of timber for pulp, paper and lumber, and supported thousands of jobs in Southeast Alaska. Since then, market forces have drastically changed. Today, the Tongass supports fewer than 100 timber jobs, which account for less than 1 percent of regional employment.

What has replaced logging as the primary economic engine in the region is tourism and commercial salmon fishing. They represent 26 percent of jobs in the region. The [Forest Service](#) reported in 2017 that there were 2.9 million visits to the Tongass National Forest, and that visitors spent \$382 million and supported 3,947 jobs. More than a million of these visits were by means of Alaska's popular cruise ships.

The Tongass National Forest also produces a quarter of the West Coast's commercial salmon catch, around 50 million salmon. Roadless areas throughout the U.S. produce clean drinking water for millions of Americans, and the pristine rivers and streams flow from these places and provide high-quality habitat for salmon and other cold-water fish. Roads, and logging roads in particular, often degrade streams and rivers and water quality. If you enjoy eating fresh Alaskan salmon, chances are your food source originated in the Tongass.

Now, timber harvesting on national forests is absolutely a viable and important multiple use. It provides jobs and wood products while reducing the fire hazard and improving forest health. But due to expensive road building and transportations costs, lack of sawmill capacity and low timber values, the Tongass has the least economically-efficient timber sale program in the National Forest System.

A recent report from Taxpayers for Common Sense found that timber sales on the Tongass have actually cost the American taxpayers roughly \$600 million since 1999, or \$30 million per year on average in 2018 dollars.

It is difficult to justify opening up roadless areas in the Tongass for timber sales, which are

heavily subsidized by American taxpayers, while simultaneously jeopardizing the industries that are adding to the regional tax base.

During my tenure as [Forest Service](#) chief, two other states — Idaho and Colorado — asked for latitude in managing their state's roadless areas. After many public meetings and comment periods, the [Forest Service](#) and state officials agreed to rules that provided stricter protection for some roadless areas and more flexibility for others. A total exemption was never seriously considered because it would set a troubling precedent for other states and was not in the spirit of the national rule to protect important lands on our national forests.

As the [Forest Service](#) moves ahead with the Alaska roadless rule process, it should learn from the lessons and successes of Idaho and Colorado, particularly the importance of having a robust public involvement process that is unencumbered by heavy-handed political influence. I trust that the [Forest Service](#) will consider the facts, weigh the fiscal consequences and make a decision that is best suited for Alaskan residents and our nation's public lands.

• *Dale Bosworth was chief of the [U.S. Forest Service](#).*

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[Governor K.K.K. Blackface Northam should study up a little bit on Virginia history, at least about what happened to the last Virginia Governor who attempted to seize guns and ammunition from Virginia patriots. Lord Dunmore ended up wounded, chased out of his burned home, and holed up with his family on a boat in the middle of the York River. His supporters were then decisively defeated at the Battle of Great Bridge after which, those that didn't die of shot, shell, or disease turned tail and fled with the Dunmores to New York for protection. Governor Northam and his sycophants should strongly reconsider their masturbatory fantasies about using unconstitutional force to seize guns or ammunition from our state's citizens . . . or if not, they should begin to make residency arrangements with Mayor Bill de Blasio for an upcoming move to New York City. I suspect ole Blackface and the Northern Virginia, Charlottesville, Richmond, Portsmouth, and Hampton Democrats do not realize what the rank-and-file of the State Police and the Virginia National Guard think about this. I do, and there is no way will they fight against armed sheriffs and their fellow patriotic citizens of our Commonwealth. It is foolish to give an order that won't be obeyed.](#)

