

Trump's actions threaten Tongass Forest – Willamette Collegian

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Recently Donald Trump tried to buy Greenland. Even a satirical publication like *The Onion* couldn't have fabricated a story so equally hilarious, bizarre and terrifying. Having Trump as president of the United States might almost be entertaining if the implications of his actions were not only speeding up the erosion of America's humanity, but also its forests and other natural landscapes.

Last week the news began circulating that Trump was pressuring Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to exempt the Tongass National Forest in Alaska from logging protections that have been in effect since Bill Clinton was president. Here's why you should care and be concerned.

Tongass is the world's largest temperate rainforest and covers 500 miles of southeast Alaska. A little under 100,000 people live within the borders of Tongass, but it is mainly known for its old growth forests and thriving wildlife population.

In the 1960s, Tongass was heavily logged. After years of back and forth, President Clinton instituted a "roadless rule" that would prevent roads from being built into large areas of Tongass, saving it from logging. Trump is trying to abolish rule to open Tongass to logging again.



When it comes to environmental issues, Trump's track record is deeply concerning. A recent *CNN* piece detailed a collection of actions Trump has taken against environmental regulations. He withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement, which is an international initiative to combat greenhouse gas emissions. He supported the Dakota Access Pipeline, which in addition to having negative environmental impacts, was also a devastating blow to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, whose land was in the direct path of the pipeline. The pipeline contaminated water supplies, and its construction violated the Fort Laramie Treaty. He's supported going forward with drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), a 19.6 million acre habitat for Alaskan wildlife. You get the picture.

Junior James Kalama grew up in Alaska and is "immensely worried" about what Trump's move on Tongass could mean. While he could understand why some might see logging Tongass as a temporary solution to aid Alaska's struggling economy, he believes it's "a bandage on top of an open wound."

“Logging Tongass would be another massive mistake when it comes to the future of biodiversity, preserving Alaska for generations to come, and, of course, the survival of the human race,” Kalama said.

But all of this is happening in Alaska. Why should a bunch of Oregon college students care?

“There are a plethora of reasons: limiting climate change, fighting against further colonization of Indigenous lands and supporting your friends from Alaska are just a few reasons that come to mind. The impacts of changes in the climate are already being felt and Alaskans have been feeling it for awhile,” Kalama said.

He went on to detail some of the specific ways he’s already been alerted to the effects of climate change in Alaska.

“I know many friends who work in fishing and many others who also subsist off the land and this past year was difficult to say the least. River waters in Alaska were much warmer than normal and many salmon that were spawning actually were suffering heart attacks because of it,” Kalama said.

Maybe the Tongass isn’t in Willamette’s backyard. Maybe you don’t know anyone in Alaska. Maybe you don’t even like the outdoors all that much. But I’m guessing you like living on this planet, and I would hope that you can have empathy for other people, though I’m not sure the same level of empathy could be said of our President.

At this point it’s unclear if Trump will be successful in getting protections removed from Tongass. If he succeeds, we should be very concerned and ready to protest. Even if he is unsuccessful, that doesn’t mean the coast is clear. Getting rid of environmental protections, logging more wood and drilling more oil is like setting fire to a house while you’re trapped inside. People like Trump won’t live long enough to see the house burn down, but we will. Our children will. If you haven’t already, you should probably start caring about Tongass National Forest, and all the other places President Trump is endangering. Look them up. They’re not the only ones in danger.

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