

# **The Washington Post**

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## **We need the Tongass now more than ever**

By **Brendan Jones**

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*Brendan Jones is author of the novel "[The Alaskan Laundry](#)."*

President Trump's decision to direct his agriculture secretary to explore opening America's largest national forest to logging comes as no surprise, considering that Friedrich Trump, the president's grandfather, made his original fortune amid the Alaska gold rush. But at a moment when so much of the Brazilian rainforest goes up in cinders, the abolishment of federal protections for the Tongass National Forest is maddening nonetheless. This decision will cost the country its most substantial set of lungs, as well as our largest stand of old-growth trees — some of which began life more than 1,000 years ago.

Encouraged by his friend John Muir, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the Tongass a national forest in 1907. An enchanted world of glaciers, fjords and colossal stands of spruce and hemlock, today the 17 million-acre area is the world's largest intact temperate rainforest, covering 80 percent of the Alaskan Panhandle — known colloquially as "Southeast." Referred to by Forest Service rangers as the "crown jewel," the Tongass provides habitat for some of America's most iconic creatures: bald eagles, salmon, wolves. Baranof Island, where I live with my wife and two daughters, is home to 1,500 brown bears — about 1 for every 6 people in town.

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