

Save the rare wild beauty of the Tongass National Forest from renewed logging

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When we were young children in the early '90s, we saw the timber industry here in Southeast Alaska collapse due to a lack of profitability, despite half a century of heavy federal subsidies. We are the daughters of loggers and commercial fishermen, and we grew up in neighboring villages on Prince of Wales Island, the largest and the most aggressively clear-cut island in the coastal temperate rainforest that is the Tongass National Forest.

Decades later, our politicians are still trying to resurrect a moribund timber industry that could never stand on its own in the first place. As lifelong residents of Tongass communities, we strongly oppose the U.S. Forest Service's current effort to end the vital protection that our home currently enjoys under the Roadless Rule.

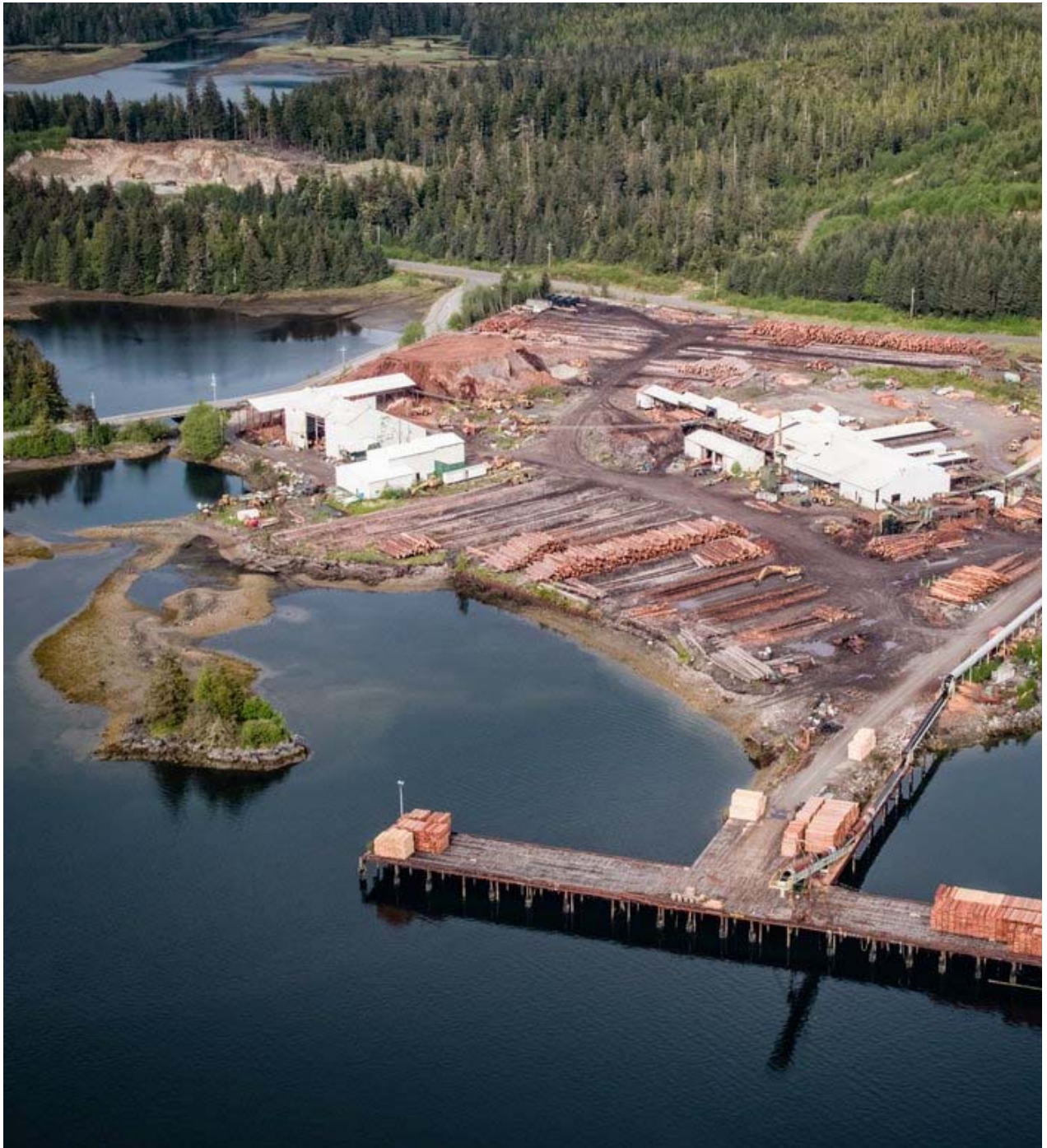


The Trump administration is trying to lift Roadless Rule protections from Alaska's Tongass National Forest. The Roadless Rule protects 9.2 million acres of the forest from road-building and logging. (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media)

Introduced in 2001, the Roadless Rule established significant restrictions on road construction and timber harvesting on 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas across all national forest lands. In the Tongass, the Roadless Rule protects about half the forest's 17 million acres. This year, in response to top-down directives, the Forest Service has proposed a total exemption of the Tongass from the Roadless Rule.

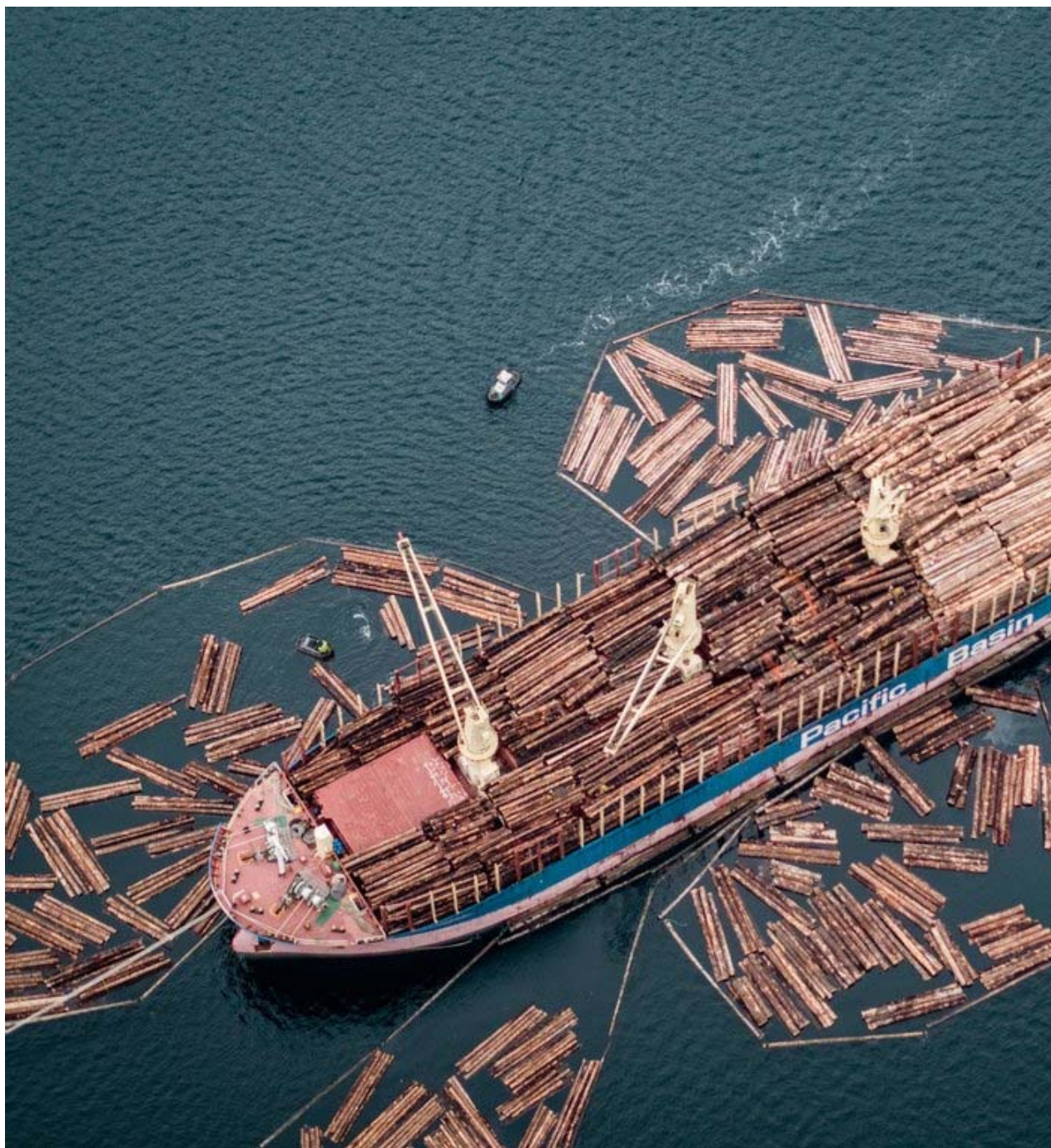
This action is justified by a disingenuous claim that Roadless protections are stifling economic growth in Southeast Alaska. The fact is, the Roadless Rule is working for Southeast Alaska. Exemptions have been consistently granted when needed, for community access and hydroelectric development, for example. It's pretty clear to Southeast Alaskans that this process is happening at the behest of a couple timber companies whose business models rely on round-log export to Asia. The so-called timber industry that Alaska's politicians romanticize collapsed years before the Roadless Rule was put into effect. It's important to remember that the timber

industry has been less than 1% of our regional economy for decades. Since the decline of timber, the Southeast Alaska economy has diversified, and tourism has grown significantly — now tourism jobs outnumber timber jobs 20 to 1.



Viking Mill on Prince of Wales Island is the last large-scale mill in Southeast Alaska. The mill provides about 35 jobs, which make up most of what politicians refer to as the region's timber industry. (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media)

We ask that our elected officials set aside their outdated politics, stop conjuring falsehoods about impacts to communities and start treating the wishes of a clear majority of their constituents with a degree of respect. Our government should protect salmon and wildlife habitat, and the rare wild beauty of the Tongass which nourishes our tourism economy. When Southeast Alaska's communities participate in public process, we should be listened to.



A Hong Kong-flagged transport vessel is loaded with logs on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island. Most of the timber harvested in Southeast Alaska is exported to Asia, which means that... (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media) [More](#)

Likewise, we demand that our politicians and decision-makers respect the voices of indigenous people. Tribes have been asked to engage with the Alaska Roadless Rulemaking process as cooperating agencies, but their input, knowledge and needs have carried little weight in the decision-making process to date. This is unacceptable. The Organized Village of Kake, the Ketchikan Indian Community, the Organized Village of Saxman, the Craig Tribal Association and the Organized Village of Kasaan have all passed resolutions expressing a desire to keep the Roadless Rule in effect on the Tongass.

As two women from Prince of Wales Island, we believe that the Forest Service should strive for balance and respect as it moves toward its final decision. We grew up on land now marred by shortsighted timber policies of the past: Much of Prince of Wales is heavily degraded by old clear-cuts that won't offer valuable wildlife habitat for hundreds of years. Though our island is only 135 miles long, it already has 2,500 miles of logging roads. The last remaining stands of

ancient forest are essential for holding Prince of Wales in ecological balance. Continuing to road and log Prince of Wales Island will jeopardize the needs of rural communities, including our home villages, which are totally dependent on the subsistence harvest of Sitka black tail deer.



Elsa Sebastian holds a coho salmon caught on her family fishing boat near her home village on Prince of Wales. The Tongass is a salmon stronghold; each year commercial fishermen catch 49 million... (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media)
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The U.S. Forest Service must respect Southeast Alaska's communities, but it also owes a responsibility to our nation. We should never forget that the Tongass is a national forest, and right now our nation faces an unprecedented threat from global climate change. We have a responsibility to protect ancient forests as natural buffers against climate change, and the Tongass is the largest carbon sink in our national forest system. For the U.S. Forest Service to ignore and exacerbate our climate emergency, while wasting taxpayer dollars on resurrecting a timber industry whose time has long since passed, is beyond irresponsible — it's foolhardy.



Marina Anderson stands in a Haida longhouse with cedar totems carved by her ancestors more than 200 years ago. When Anderson was a child, her father worked as a logger and road-builder on Prince of... (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media)
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As lifelong Alaskans and young women actively engaged in building a resilient future for Southeast Alaska, we ask that U.S. Forest Service decision-makers leave the Roadless Rule intact for the Tongass by selecting the “no action” alternative.



A pro-Roadless Rule rally in Juneau, Alaska's capital. Public meetings held by the U.S. Forest Service across Southeast Alaska have been overwhelmed by locals who want the Roadless Rule to continue to... (Colin Arisman / Wild Confluence Media)
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[Send your comments on Alaska Roadless Rulemaking and logging in the Tongass National Forest to the U.S. Forest Service by Dec. 17.](#)

Elsa M. Sebastian is a second-generation fisherman. She gillnets in Bristol Bay and captained a Southeast Alaska salmon troller for most of her 20s. She runs a Tongass ground-truthing and advocacy project called Last Stands.

Marina Anderson is tribal vice president for the Organized Village of Kasaan, and with her partner, owns a business, AK Rooted, and operates an artisan network, the Alaska Artisan Network. As an artist, Marina is inspired and driven by her indigenous Alaska Native roots.