



United States Department of the Interior

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December 12, 2019

Mr. Ken Tu
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Forest Service
P.O. Box 21628
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1628

Subject: Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Statement for proposed Alaska Roadless Rule, Tongass National Forest

Dear Mr. Tu:

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas on the Tongass National Forest, which was prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Our comments and recommendations are submitted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, and the NEPA Implementing Regulations 40 CFR parts 1500-1508) and National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 (16 USC 1).

The USFS public rulemaking process for Alaska Roadless Areas will address the management of inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest. The USFS is proposing to develop a long-term approach to address social, economic, and ecological issues on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska in response to the January 2018 petition by the State of Alaska, requesting a regulatory exemption from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (66 FR 3244). An Alaska Roadless Rule would replace the 2001 Roadless Rule in Alaska only. The 2001 Roadless Rule prohibits, with some exceptions, road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting on certain National Forest System lands across the country.

The DOI submitted formal comments to USFS on October 15, 2018, in response to a Notice of Intent to prepare this Draft EIS. At that time, the USFS was soliciting public input on the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues related to Alaska-specific rulemaking that should be analyzed in depth in the document. The Department's previous comments noted the potential for impacts to lands managed by the DOI's National Park Service (NPS) as well as species-specific information by location for areas on the Tongass National

Forest, including forested islands, with recommendations for habitat protection prioritization. Consistent with those comments, the NPS and USFWS may provide comments and recommendations on resource concerns and locations on project-specific NEPA documents in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft EIS for Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas. DOI bureaus remain available to provide additional information and technical assistance. If you would like any assistance regarding tourism and recreation issues, please contact Ms. Brooke Merrell, Environmental Planning and Compliance Team Leader with NPS (907-644-3397 or brooke_merrell@nps.gov). If you would like any assistance regarding fish, wildlife, and habitat issues, please contact Ms. Jennifer Spegon, Fish and Wildlife Biologist with USFWS (907-271-2768 or jennifer_spegon@fws.gov).

Sincerely,

Michaela Noble

Michaela E. Noble
Director, Office of Environmental Policy and
Compliance