

May 6, 2024

Addressed To:

Secretary Vilsack

Undersecretary Wilkes

Deputy Undersecretary Meryl Harrell

Special Assistant Sean Babbington

CC: Planning Team Leader for the National Old Growth Amendment - Jennifer McRae.

**Urging the Department of Agriculture to include the Tongass National Forest in the
proposed National Old Growth Forest Plan Amendment**

We are outfitters and guides, tour operators, gear manufacturers and retailers, and businesses that value and depend on the Tongass National Forest. We employ hundreds of Southeast Alaskans, have tens of thousands of Alaskan supporters, and cater to customers who travel to the Tongass for its world-class landscapes, fish and wildlife, and recreation opportunities. We are encouraged that the United States Department of Agriculture is considering adopting a national forest plan amendment rule to protect old-growth forests but are concerned that the proposed rule effectively exempts the Tongass National Forest. We urge you to drop the Tongass exemption and ensure the old-growth forests of the Tongass are protected from logging.

In December of 2023, the USDA announced it is preparing an environmental impact statement that will “propose to amend all land management plans for units of the National Forest System . . . to include consistent direction to conserve and steward existing and recruit future old-growth forest conditions,” yet the preliminary proposed action the USDA is considering would prohibit commercial logging of old-growth trees in all national forests *except* the Tongass National Forest, the largest old-growth forest in the nation. We do not support any exemption for the Tongass and urge the Department to remove it from the preliminary proposed rule.

We appreciate the recent efforts USDA has made, through the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy, to shift forest management toward supporting resilience, recreation, and restoration. Our businesses benefit from intact forests and healthy ecosystems; allowing logging of the remaining old-growth forests in the Tongass is inconsistent with these goals and we collectively agree that the Tongass National Forest must be included in the proposed National Old-Growth Amendment. Old-growth areas are some of the best and most valuable in the forest, offering the ideal combination of beautiful scenery, wild landscapes, abundant fish and wildlife, and the access our growing tourism and recreation industry needs. Old-growth protections for these unique values give our businesses and organizations a level of certainty upon which we base our business investments and hiring decisions.

The Tongass is a paradise — not just for Alaskans, but for all Americans. Old-growth areas in the Tongass contain much of the region’s most productive wildlife habitat, quality

salmon habitat and clean water, and recreation opportunities. Any durable and long-lasting solution to the persistent land-management challenges on the Tongass must be based on collaboration and care for the values that make the Tongass unique among our public lands. The proposed National Old-Growth Amendment fails on this measure and on meeting the needs of businesses and organizations like ours. We ask that the USDA not exempt the Tongass from the National Old-Growth Amendment.

Sincerely,

Above and Beyond Alaska, LLC
Becky Janes, President
Juneau, AK

Alaska Mountain Guides
Sean Gaffney, Owner
Haines, AK

Alaska Remote Lodges, LLC
Kim Kirby, Owner
Ketchikan, AK

Bear Creek Outfitters
Arne Johnson, Owner
Juneau, AK

Blue Heron B & B at Glacier Bay
Deb Woodruff, Owner
Gustavus, AK

Cross Island Services, LLC
Peter Cross, Owner
Juneau, AK

Devil's Club Brewing Company
Evan Wood, Co-Founder
Juneau, AK

Farragut Farms
Marja Smets and Bo Varsano, Co-Owners
Farragut Bay, AK

Fisher Girl Yarns
Kim Kirby, Owner
Ketchikan, AK

Fishing Bear Charters
Tuck Harry, Owner
Tenakee Springs, AK

Gastineau Guiding
Robie Janes and Dawn Wolfe,
General Manager & President
Juneau, AK

Glacier Bay Sea Kayaks
Kara Berg & Leah Okin, Owner/Manager
Gustavus, AK

Glacier Bear Lodge
Yakutat, AK

Honeywilya Fish
Lynn & Maria Steyaart, Owners
Petersburg, AK

The Laughing Raven Lodge
Molly Kimzey, Owner
Port Alexander, AK

Laughing Raven Charters
Molly Kimzey, Owner
Port Alexander, AK

Mallot's General Store Inc.
Caroline & Larry Powell
President, Vice-President
Yakutat, AK

The Mooring Lodge
Larry Powell, Owner
Yakutat, AK

National Outdoor Leadership School
Ashley Wise, Alaska Branch Manager
Palmer, AK

Patagonia
Meghan Wolf, Environmental Activism Manager
Reno, NV

Peak Design

Annie Nyborg, Head of Environmental and Social Impact
Ojai, CA

Pybus Point Lodge

Darryl Bosshardt, General Manager
Pybus Point, AK

Schoolhouse Fish Company

Malena Marvin & Eric Grundberg, Owners
Petersburg, AK

Sitka Fish Outfitters

Jaime Steinson, Owner
Sitka, AK

Spirit Walker Expeditions

Gustavus, AK

Tongass Logging Company

Gordon Chew, Owner
Tenakee Springs, AK

Uncruise Adventures

Dan Blanchard, Owner
Juneau, AK

Yakutat Lodge

Yakutat, AK