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First name: Kirsten  
Last name: Blackburn  
Organization: The Conservation Alliance  
Title: Advocacy Manager  
Comments: December 16, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue

U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave., S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Alaska Roadless Rulemaking #54511

Dear Secretary Perdue,

As companies that make and sell products for recreating in the outdoors, we strongly oppose recent proposals to exempt Alaska's Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. National Forest roadless areas provide some of the finest outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States. Our National Forest roadless areas - including the 9.3 million acres in the Tongass - are where millions of people enjoy hiking, biking, camping, hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities each year. Together, we write in support of the No-Action Alternative for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed Alaska Roadless Rule, Alternative #1, and stand united in our recommendation to retain long-standing protections for roadless areas within the Tongass National Forest.

Adopted in 2001 after one of the most extensive public involvement processes in the history of federal rulemaking, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule protects 58.5 million acres of roadless areas from harmful road building and commercial logging. More than 1.7 million people commented during this 2001 rulemaking process, of which the vast majority favored strong roadless area protection across the country. A recent public opinion poll conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts found 75 percent of the public support the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, with rural and urban residents equally supportive. Exempting Alaska from this important national policy would set a bad precedent for reducing roadless area protections elsewhere.

The recreational values of roadless areas and all public lands managed for recreation and conservation serve as the backbone of the United State's growing outdoor recreation economy. According to a study conducted by the Outdoor Industry Association, the outdoor industry generates \$887 billion in annual consumer spending, creates

7.6 million jobs, and brings in \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue. Protective public land policies like the Roadless Area Conservation Rule are essential to the continued health of the industry and the communities that rely on them. The stakes are even higher for the outdoor recreation and tourism industry in Southeast Alaska.

Southeast Alaska's tourism industry depends on the scenic wildness and thriving wildlife of the Tongass National Forest. These qualities make the Tongass unique in the world and attractive to visitors from across the country and around the world. In 2017, Southeast Alaska's visitor industry directly employed 7,739 people and accounted for 17 percent of total regional employment. That says nothing of Southeast Alaska's fishing industry. The pristine forests and watersheds of the Tongass produce almost 80 percent of the commercial salmon harvested annually from Southeast Alaska. Combined, tourism and fisheries jobs, relying on the wildlife and scenery of the Tongass, comprise one quarter of all jobs in Southeast Alaska.

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule has provided effective protection both for wildlands and recreational opportunities for nearly two decades. Exempting Alaska, and its Tongass National Forest from this important national policy in favor of road building and timber harvest would irreparably damage roadless areas and the recreation, wildlife, and tourism values they embody. We strongly endorse the No-Action Alternative to support upholding the national roadless rule in Alaska.

Sincerely,

The Conservation Alliance

Brady Robinson, Executive Director

Bend, OR 97703

AdventureKEEN

Molly Merkle, Chief Operating Officer

Birmingham, AL 35233

All Good

Lindsey Bolton, Community Director

Morro Bay, CA 93442

Alpacka Raft

Sarah & Thor Tingey, Co-Owners

Mancos, CO 81328

Backpacker's Pantry

Rodney Smith, President

Boulder, CO 80301

Bergreen Photography

Marc Bergreen, Owner

Evergreen, CO 80437

CamelBak Products

Greg Williamson, President

Petaluma, CA 94954

Chaco Footwear

Chip Coe, President

Rockford, MI 49351

College Outside

Sarah Lockwood, CEO

Carpinteria, CA 93013[middot]

Dongah Aluminum Corporation DAC

Paul Svrcek, Representative

Vashon, WA 98070

Farm to Feet

Kelly Nester, CEO

Mount Airy, NC 27030

Fourpoints Bar Co.

Patrick and Kevin Webber, Founders

Denver, CO 80213

GRAYL

Travis Merrigan, Co-Founder

Seattle, WA 98119

Great Plains Mountain Stuff

Leta H Kalfas, President and CEO

Denver, CO 80238

Helinox USA, Inc.

Ted Ganio, CEO

Berkeley, CA 94710

Helly Hansen

Damien Etchaubard, Marketing Director

Sumner, WA 98390

Hipcamp

Alyssa Ravasio, Founder & CEO

San Francisco, CA 94103

Idaho River Adventures

Dustin W. Aherin, Owner

Lewiston, ID 83501

IPA Connect, LLC

Andy Marker - Owner/President

Hood River, OR 97031

Kahtoola

Danny Giovale

Flagstaff, AZ 86001

Kiitella, Inc.

Lisa Issenberg, CEO

Ridgway, CO 81432

Nester Hosiery

Kelly Nester, CEO

Mount Airy, NC 27030

New Belgium Brewing

Steve Fechheimer, CEO

Fort Collins, CO 80524

Northwest Rafting Company

Zachary Collier, Owner/Outfitter

Hood River, OR 97031

O'Keefe Consulting, LLC

Geoff O'Keefe, President

Boulder County, CO 80310

Oxbow Productions

Pete McBride, Director

Basalt, CO 81621

Patagonia

Hans Cole, Director of Advocacy & Environmental Campaigns

Venture, CA 93001

Peak Design

Annie Nyborg, Sustainability Director

San Francisco, CA 94107

Perpetual Motion NW

David Egan, Owner

Fall City, WA 90024

Ruffwear

Patrick Kruse, Founder and Director of R&D

Bend, OR 97703

Sanitas Sales Group

Keith Reis, President

Louisville, CO 80027

Shar

Peter Rushford, Founder/CEO

Austin, TX 78703

Shift Advantage

Eric Brody, Principal

Portland, OR 97211

Superfeet

Linda Balfour, VP Marketing

Ferndale, WA 98248

The Zane Ray Group, Inc.

Reed Gregerson, President

Whitefish, MT 59937

Toad & Co

Gordon Seabury, CEO

Santa Barbara, CA 93103

Uncage the Soul Productions

John Waller, Principal

Portland, OR 97214

Verde Brand Communications

Kristin Carpenter, CEO

Durango, CO 81302

Wildlands Policy Institute

Peter Metcalf, Partner

Park City, UT 84068



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