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Organization: Olympic Park Associates (OPA)

Title:

Comments: Alaska Roadless DEIS Comment

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Dear Secretary Perdue:

Olympic Park Associates (OPA) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Alaska Roadless DEIS. Olympic Park Associates is an organization of citizens, living primarily in Washington State, who value being able to enjoy and conserve the public lands on the Olympic Peninsula. Our organization's mission is "to protect the wilderness and ecological integrity of Olympic National Park and the Olympic ecosystem." The integrity of the Olympic National Park is augmented by the protections on lands surrounding it, such as wilderness designation and roadless rules, that are very similar to important protections in place in the Tongass National Forest.

OPA supports the No-Action Alternative for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed Alaska Roadless Rule, Alternative #1.

OPA supports keeping the current Roadless Rule protections in place and intact for the Tongass National Forest. The Tongass contains some of the largest intact old-growth temperate rainforest in the world, and its value in providing clean water for fish and wildlife habitat is essential to the economic and ecological health of Southeast Alaska. OPA urges you to keep the federal Roadless Rule intact and current protections in place for national forests in Alaska.

The new proposal undermines the Roadless Rule, a law that has long protected much of our last remaining wild national forests from logging and other development across the country. At almost 17 million acres, the Tongass is the nation's largest national forest and is among one of the world's few remaining relatively intact temperate rainforests. The Roadless Rule protects 9.3 million acres of breathtaking, undeveloped roadless land in the Tongass--twice the size of Yellowstone, Glacier, and Grand Canyon National Parks combined! Not only does this attack threaten habitat for wildlife like grizzly bears, moose and salmon, but it sets a bad precedent that could lead to logging and road construction in remote, wild forest areas across the nation. The Tongass National Forest is among the planet's best carbon sinks--under this proposal, old-growth trees that help us to mitigate climate change by storing vast amounts of carbon would be especially targeted.

Climate models show Alaska warming faster than the rest of the country - the changes are already visible - but the Tongass is poised to fare better than its surrounding landscapes. That could make it an oasis for wildlife that feels climate pressures elsewhere. But destroying habitat by logging and fragmenting the remainder with roads undermines that option.

In addition, Olympic Park Associates strongly objects to your plans to reduce and remove protections from our national forest's roadless areas. The Roadless Rule is one of the smartest and most popular land management policies the Federal Government has ever adopted. Not only does it preserve some of America's best fish and wildlife habitat, but it also saves untold millions of taxpayer dollars that might otherwise be spent to subsidize money-losing timber sales while degrading desperately needed salmon habitat. The value of the Roadless Rule

in preventing environmentally damaging and economically wasteful road-building and logging is particularly relevant in the Tongass, where logging costs vastly exceed timber revenues and require unconscionable taxpayer subsidies.

Our National Forests are important public lands that provide numerous benefits to not only our human population but also to fish and wildlife. This in turn, provides value to many individuals who appreciate these Forests for their recreation, quiet, non-timber forest products, and clean air and water.

Sincerely,

Donna Osseward, President

Olympic Park Associates

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