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First name: Anon

Last name: olough

Organization:

Title:

Comments: We want to keep the Roadless Rule in the Tongass

We urge you to select the "No Action" alternative on the Alaska-specific Roadless Rule instead of the sweeping changes the administration is promoting that would completely remove the Tongass National Forest from roadless protections.

The Tongass National Forest is one of the last intact temperate rainforests on Earth, with pristine old growth forests in its roadless lands. Home to a stunningly diverse array of wildlife including salmon, wolves, bear, deer, and birds of prey such as the Northern Goshawk, the Tongass is America's largest and wildest national forest. It plays a vital role in absorbing greenhouse gas emissions, storing approximately 8 percent of the total carbon of all the national forests of the lower 48 states combined. It also contains sacred sites of great importance to Native people of Alaska.

The proposed rule opens an additional 165,000 acres to devastating logging and strips Roadless Rule protections from all 9.2 million acres of inventoried roadless areas in the Tongass. It does so with little to no justification or documented support. The rule will fragment the forest and harm wildlife that rely on old-growth habitat. For example, the rule will allow new roads and logging that threaten important wild salmon populations and the very rare Alexander Archipelago wolves.

The proposed rule's claim that exempting the entire Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule will have only minimal environmental effect is simply not justified by the record, and an overwhelming majority of public and stakeholder input favored either maintaining roadless areas or making small modifications. The course chosen by the administration ignores the public, fails to find balance, and threatens the crown jewel of the National Forest System.

We strongly urge the Forest Service to select Alternative 1, the "no-action" alternative.

Thank you,

Michael and Susan O'Loughlin