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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Please maintain protections for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests

Dear Secretary Sonny Perdue,

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) safeguards million acres of roadless forest across both the Tongass and Chugach National Forests of Alaska. These publicly owned and managed areas have been protected to conserve watersheds, wildlife habitat and recreational values for the last twenty years.

Now, because of the petition submitted by the state of Alaska, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is considering removing these protections.

This move threatens national forest lands across the state, from ancient forests including thousand-year-old Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and western red cedar. The Tongass National Forest contains nearly 10 million acres of Intact Forest Landscape (IFL)--the unbroken natural landscape of a forest ecosystem and its habitat. That's more than half the IFL in all the lower 48 states. Once these roadless areas are gone, they're gone forever.

The Tongass is also home to species including brown bear, wolf, eagles, black-tailed deer, and world-class salmon habitat that support commercial and recreational fisheries. The Tongass produces 28% of Alaska's annual commercial salmon catch, and 25% of the entire west coast annual harvest. The Forest Service estimates that the salmon industry generates \$986 million annually. In fact, in an August 2019, letter to your office, Southeast Alaska fishermen and fisherwomen urged the Forest Service to select an alternative that protects fish habitat, continues the phase-out of old-growth clear-cutting, and prioritizes the restoration of degraded watersheds and streams. Instead, the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service have proposed to renew large-scale logging that would adversely impact the tourism and commercial fishing industries of Southeast Alaska. Logging roads and tree removal will destroy this valuable habitat and accelerate species loss.

The Tongass National Forest is the largest intact temperate rainforest in North America. Temperate rainforests sequester huge amounts of carbon dioxide, keeping the climate-warming gas out of the atmosphere. It is more important now than ever to protect our forests.

Tribal governments in Alaska also oppose lifting protections against logging. Native peoples also rely on this land to sustain their way of life and depend on the wild food sources that the forest provides.

I urge you to maintain protections for our national forests in Alaska. Stop the rollback of the Roadless Rule in Alaska and protect our national forests, their rich biodiversity, and the fishing, recreational industries, and native communities that rely on protected lands.

Sincerely,

Michelle Geoffroy

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