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First name: Mary

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Alaska Roadless Rule: Please select Alternative 1, or No Action

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As a resident of the Tongass National Forest, and the mother of a child born here in the Tongass National Forest this year, I'm writing to urge you in the strongest terms possible to maintain Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass National Forest and to select "no action" or Alternative 1.

My partner and I were shocked, when looking at the maps provided by the Forest Service last year, to see particular places from which Roadless protections would be stripped under a full exemption. Some of our favorite hunting grounds for Sitka blacktail deer, for example, are up for the removal of roadless protections. This threatens not only the food security of many families we know, it threatens the future of the way we interact with this place. Will my partner be able to take our son hunting on the same mountains he grew up hunting? Not if they are opened up for clearcutting, roads, and industrial development.

The Roadless Rule is working for Southeast Alaska, and the vast majority of people here want protections to stay in place.

To add insult to injury, the USFS has not recorded public comment at the public meetings it has held this fall - and USFS representative Chris French had the temerity to tell attendees in Juneau that the lack of opportunity to comment publicly is due to the USFS's desire to BETTER reflect people's wishes. This is a spin worthy of an Orwellian dystopia. In what world would depriving people who have made an effort to attend a public meeting of an opportunity to testify publicly constitute "better" representation of their wishes?

The USFS has also consistently downplayed local opposition to the removal of Roadless protections. As just one example, the USFS written summary of in-person scoping comments in 2018 says that "the majority" of people testifying supported Roadless protections. That number was actually closer to 95 percent, according to what the USFS told cooperating agencies. There is a huge difference between 51 percent and 95 percent, and it's unconscionable that the USFS, with the support of Alaska's elected leaders, is in effect trying to silence so many Alaska residents.

The Tongass is the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world and the largest remaining intact temperate rainforest on Earth. Its old growth is essential habitat for Sitka blacktail deer, mountain goats, brown bears, black bears, and all five species of wild Alaska salmon. Wild salmon have disappeared across most of the rest of the Pacific Northwest, due in part to development and irresponsible logging practices. A study published in November from USFS scientists Adelaide Johnson and J. Ryan Bellmore quantifies the millions of dollars that the Tongass provides, for free, to the Alaska economy in terms of salmon produced by the forest and caught by the commercial fishing industry. I urge the USFS to take this study into account when considering a return to yesterday's destructive logging practices, which damage our modern-day economy. The clearcut old growth timber industry targets old growth, and road sedimentation damages salmon streams. Clearcut logging and roads also damages salmon streams other ways, even with mitigation efforts, like stream buffers, in place. In subsidizing the destruction of some of the Tongass's last remaining old growth, the USFS is also paying taxpayer dollars to damage Southeast Alaska's biggest economic drivers. The removal of Roadless protections would be a disaster for fisheries and for the visitor industry, Southeast Alaska's two biggest businesses, which contribute \$2 billion annually to Southeast Alaska's economy.

As a resident of the Tongass, I support sustainable harvest of the forest's trees - small scale, sustainable harvest, which is processed locally and which adds to our local economy. That, however, is not what is being proposed with the removal of Roadless protections in the Tongass. U.S. taxpayers already lose an average of \$30 million a year in handouts to the timber industry here in the Tongass even with roadless protections in place. That's a total of \$600 million over the last 20 years. If Roadless protections are removed, that number will skyrocket.

Additionally, the Tongass is in the only national forest in which timber operators are still allowed to clearcut old growth. Under the current plan/Alternative 6, 165,000 acres of old growth will be targeted for clearcut. As our planet faces a climate emergency, it's unconscionable - and foolish - to pay taxpayer money to destroy one of our greatest resources in the war against climate change. It's also fiscally unwise; even if the USFS made money from selling clearcuts of our trees, which it emphatically does not, the USFS is throwing away opportunities for carbon storage or programs that could actually make money when it pays taxpayer money to enable timber operators to destroy one of our country's greatest carbon resources.

All 57 projects applied for in the Tongass and the Chugach National Forests under the Roadless Rule have been approved. Community interties, hydroelectric projects, and other kinds of development are expressly allowed under the Roadless Rule. It is dishonest to claim, as some proponents do, that the removal of protections is in order to enable these projects.

My family relies on the Tongass National Forest for recreational fishing, for deer hunting, and for gathering. As I speak, the stand up freezer in my home is filled with salmon, venison and blueberries all supplied by the Tongass National Forest. It's a large part of the reason many of us love this place: we can interact with the land in a way that has been forgotten in most of the Lower 48, where a blueberry is something you buy at the grocery store, salmon have long disappeared from your local streams, and public land on which to hunt is in short supply.

Please: I urge you to choose Alternative 1, or NO ACTION, for the Tongass National Forest. Keep Roadless protections, which are working for the Tongass and its residents, in place.

Sincerely,

Mary Catharine Martin

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