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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

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