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Comments: See attached file(s)

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Dear Sonny Perdue, and the USDA Forest Service:

The main reason the USDA Forest Service has proposed changes to the Roadless Rule is to encourage economic development. However, as reported by Taxpayers for Common Sense, the US Forest Service [ldquo]has lost approximately \$600 million over the last twenty years, or \$30 million per year on average.[rdquo] (<https://www.taxpayer.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/TCS-Cutting-Our-Losses-2019-.pdf>). That is a staggering number, especially when I consider that the timber industries that operate in the area export their product to Asia, and do very little to support the local economy in the region.

The only remaining large-scale mill in Southeast Alaska is the Viking Mill on Prince of Wales Island. This mill employs around 35 people. It is clear to me that the system currently in place to subsidize a failing logging industry in the region is not economically sound. The Forest Service[rsquo]s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will currently allow for more road building and logging across the Tongass National Forest. Which would, in turn, require millions of taxpayer dollars to uphold.

I understand the underlying statement that the Forest Service wants to help bolster economic prosperity in rural Alaska, and the region of the Tongass National Forest. But, the region[rsquo]s economic prosperity, environmental services provision, and cultural heritage depend on a thriving ecosystem that is uninterrupted by the long-term impacts of logging. Currently, tourism and fishing make up approximately 25% of the regional economy. Whereas the timber industry makes up around 1% of the regional economy, and has remained stagnant for decades.

A rollback of the Roadless Rule would undermine the very backbone of the economy and way of life of people in coastal Southeast Alaska. If the Forest Service truly cares about the economic prosperity of the region, then I believe the current subsidies and funds currently spent in service of the timber industry should instead be channeled into the diverse and locally-owned businesses that exist in the region, Sustainable Southeast Partnership. It is paramount that the US government listen to the true needs of the people in Southeast Alaska, as expressed by them, and not the voices of a few corporate interests. Our democracy and fair governance depends on it.

As the largest national forest in the United States, the Tongass National Forest is a national treasure. It is part of

the Pacific temperate rainforest ecoregion [ndash] the world[rsquo]s largest coastal temperate rainforest. This area plays a critical role in shaping and mitigating the effects of climate change. Alternative 6 in the Forest Service[rsquo]s DEIS is the preferred and currently recommended alternative in the document. If adopted, this alternative would release 75% more carbon into the atmosphere than all other alternatives. This is an unacceptable option.

The Tongass holds between 10-12% of the carbon sequestered in the US, and is the largest carbon sink in our national forest system. It is critical that the 9.2 million acres of Tongass forests protected under the Roadless Rule remain protected. The old growth trees in these forests store the most carbon. If logged, these areas will take at least 200 years to fully recover (if possible), and during that recovery time will not be sequestering carbon as they are if left undisturbed. According to the Audubon Society[rsquo]s research, there are over 82 endemic plants and animals that are ONLY found in this area in the world. The impacts of the proposal to exempt the Tongass from the Roadless Rule will largely be felt on Prince of Wales Island. This island has experienced extensive logging already, and is where the endemic plants and animals are most threatened. I urge you to uphold protections for Roadless areas especially on Prince of Whales Island.

It is necessary and right for you, and all of us, to listen to the indigenous stewards of the lands in the Southeast Alaska region. Especially when it comes to proposed actions that will drastically change the way of life for thousands of people. Many of the indigenous people living in Southeast Alaska maintain practices of subsisting off of the land for food, businesses, and cultural heritage.

[ldquo]The Organized Village of Kake, the Ketchikan Indian Community, the Organized Village of Saxman, the Craig Tribal Association and the Organized Village of Kasaan have all passed resolutions expressing a desire to keep the Roadless Rule in effect on the Tongass.[rdquo] The Tlingit and Haida people have expressed their wishes to keep the Roadless Rule in effect on the Tongass. I stand in solidarity with them.

I have had the honor of spending a summer in the Great Bear Rainforest, part of the Pacific temperate rainforest ecoregion [ndash] the world[rsquo]s largest coastal temperate rainforest. This area is directly South of the Tongass National Forest, and stretches for more than 250 miles along the coast of British Columbia. In only a few months in the Great Bear, I became deeply attached to the area. It is hard for me to talk with people about its beauty, because every time I do I long to be back there. It is a strong and deep yearning to experience the wonders of that region[rsquo]s ocean, forests, mountains, streams, and wildlife.

If at all possible, take the time to visit the coastal rainforest along the coast of British Columbia, and specifically the Tongass in Southeast Alaska. I can almost guarantee this visit will make you feel alive, and awaken to the beauty of the natural world and way of life in the region. I grew up on Orcas Island, in the San Juan Islands in Washington State. My experiences and connection to the natural world at such a formative time in my life have shaped who I am today.

It is imperative that we protect this country[rsquo]s wild areas from potentially and assuredly destructive

corporate interests. It is important that we do this for ourselves, and for future generations. There are ways of living in closer balance with these protected lands, as many indigenous people have expressed in their ways of life and their teachings. There are ways of encouraging economic prosperity without continued and lasting damage to wild lands.

Please revisit the DEIS, in light of the scientific and qualitative input you have received from environmental and community organizations, indigenous associations, and individuals that live and work in Southeast Alaska, and beyond.

Please consider the decision before you carefully, and listen to the comments of the people that will be impacted if the Tongass is exempted from the Roadless Rule. I believe the economic, environmental, and human health of the region depends on it. Our collective heritage will be impacted by your decision.

As a concerned citizen, as an American, as a human being I believe the best decision at the current time is the [ldquo]No Action[rdquo] Alternative (Alternative 1). I urge you to select this alternative, and allow the Roadless Rule to remain intact on the Tongass National Forest.

Sincerely,

Eliana Blaine

[Position]