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Contact: Corey Himrod  
Tel: 202-266-0426 or Email: [corey@alaskawild.org](mailto:corey@alaskawild.org)

**Farm bill amendment puts millions of acres of Tongass old-growth at risk**

*Amendment exempts all federal forests in Alaska from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule*

WASHINGTON – Today, by a single vote (208-207), the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly adopted an amendment to its 2018 farm bill that would substantially weaken protections for America’s largest national forest, the Tongass National Forest. The amendment repeals long-standing protections for old-growth forests by exempting the Tongass from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

The Roadless Rule is the result of one of the most extensive public processes in U.S. history – more than 1.6 million people submitted comments on the rule, and 95% of those commented favorably on roadless protections. Nationwide, roadless areas protect the watersheds that provide drinking water to millions of Americans, and they contain and protect more than 220 species listed as threatened, endangered or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. It has helped control the Forest Service’s multibillion-dollar road maintenance backlog, reduced conflict over loss of intact public wildlands, and preserved wildlife habitat and other vanishing natural values on public lands.

**Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:**

“There was strong bipartisan opposition to this effort to put millions of acres of pristine national forest at risk outside of the normal legislative process and without any opportunity for public input. Teddy Roosevelt created the Tongass National Forest, and we are pleased to see 23 Republicans join near unanimous Democratic opposition to yet another assault on Alaska’s public lands.

We don’t need more taxpayer subsidized roads to nowhere in Alaska, and we certainly don’t need them running right through the heart of its iconic coastal rainforest. It’s time to stop trying to turn back the clock to a time of unchecked clearcutting, and focus instead on building a long-term future for Southeast Alaska that supports sustainable industries like tourism, recreation and fishing.

The Tongass is the crown jewel of our National Forest System. It is a destination for tourism, fishing and outdoor recreation, and home to some of the last stands of temperate old-growth forest in the world. Old-growth forests and their ability to store carbon remain an important and under-recognized tool in the battle to combat climate change. Undoing roadless rule protections would put at risk millions of acres of national forest in the Tongass and cost taxpayers millions in the process.”

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[www.AlaskaWild.org](http://www.AlaskaWild.org)

122 C St NW, Ste 240, Washington, DC 20001 \* Tel: 202-544-5205 \* Fax: 202-544-5197