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U.S. Forest Service announces process to remove Alaska national forests from roadless rule

Removal would place wildlife habitat at risk and deal a blow to SE Alaska's fishing, tourism industries

Washington – Today, the U.S. Forest Service announced it is undertaking a rulemaking process to develop an Alaska state-specific roadless rule that would identify portions of Alaska national forests to remove from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This rule protects more than 58 million acres of roadless national forests, including America's two largest – the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska and the Chugach National Forest in south central Alaska. 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, 95% of which supported roadless protections.

Undoing roadless protections in Alaska's national forests simply makes no sense. Timber sales in Southeast Alaska are not economically viable without large public subsidies, and further depleting Tongass old-growth threatens billion-dollar, sustainable industries like tourism and fishing that provide thousands of jobs and continue to grow.

Statement by Andy Moderow, Alaska Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Governor Walker and the state of Alaska aren't thinking long term as they push to remove portions of the Tongass from roadless protections. They are threatening a sustainable future for Southeast Alaska so that the heavily subsidized old-growth timber industry can export raw timber and local jobs overseas. Destroying old-growth forests is not a viable strategy for the future health of Southeast Alaska. These wild places provide the foundation for strong fisheries, tourism and the Alaskan way of life.

The roadless rule protects inventoried roadless areas while providing for community access, hydropower projects, utility connectors and other economic development projects when they serve a legitimate public interest. In the long term, it will continue to help strengthen Southeast Alaska's economy, and maintain the health of our forests and the communities and wildlife that depend on them.

Removing protections would be a major step backwards for Alaska. It would endanger Southeast Alaska's billion-dollar fishing industry, while also threatening the abundant wildlife and wild places that are essential to Alaska tourism.”

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