

Alaska Wilderness League * Center for Biological Diversity * Defenders of Wildlife
*** Earthjustice * National Audubon Society * Women's Earth and Climate Action**
Network (WECAN) * Sierra Club * Southeast Alaska Environmental Council *
The Wilderness Society

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. Forest Service Pushes to Gut Protections for America's Climate Forest
Tongass National Forest jeopardized by push to abandon Roadless Rule

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Despite the ongoing and overwhelming COVID-19 crisis, the U.S. Forest Service has not slowed its push to allow a new wave of logging in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. Today the agency announced a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) advancing its proposal to eliminate the Roadless Rule in the Tongass, opening vast swaths of irreplaceable old-growth temperate rainforest to clearcut logging.

The dramatic policy shift targets the Roadless Rule, a federal safeguard that restricts logging and roadbuilding in designated wild areas. For two decades, the rule has protected old-growth forests and critical wildlife habitat in Alaska and across the country. Protecting these trees, which are champions at absorbing carbon, has helped make the Tongass a buffer against climate change. The release of the FEIS is a near-final step in the rulemaking process.

In response, a wide-ranging coalition of organizations dedicated to protecting the Tongass issued the following statement:

“This plan to roll back the Roadless Rule will open the gates to clearcutting countless century-old trees, with irreversible ecological consequences. The Tongass is not only America's largest national forest and a treasured public lands area, but it's sometimes called 'America's Climate Forest.' This temperate rainforest plays a critical role in fighting climate change by retaining vast stores of carbon in its old-growth trees.

“The Tongass is crucial for Indigenous communities who rely on hunting, fishing and wild harvest as a matter of survival.

“Roadless areas are important for imperiled wildlife like the Alexander Archipelago wolf, Queen Charlotte goshawk and marten, among others. We oppose any weakening of the Roadless Rule in the Tongass and will challenge the lifting of restrictions against logging at every turn.”

Many have raised concerns that rolling back the Roadless Rule in the Tongass will affect their lives and work. Listen to their voices in the following videos, which are available for publication.

- **Wanda Culp:** <https://youtu.be/MrylgQLepG0>
- **Joel Jackson:** <https://youtu.be/rFXV-LfMLNo>

- **Gordon Chew:** <https://youtu.be/7DvPGg7WsL8>
- **Explainer on Roadless Rule in Alaska:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmhUazFPutM&t=7s>

BACKGROUND

Since time immemorial the Tongass has been the traditional homelands of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples. The Roadless Rule is one of the most popular conservation measures of the last century. The Forest Service received a quarter of a million comments in response to its proposal to gut the rule, and 96 percent of those comments deemed unique by the Forest Service voiced support for keeping roadless protections intact. Nevertheless, in October 2019, the Forest Service released its plan to roll back the Roadless Rule in Alaska, opening new areas to clearcuts at the behest of timber corporations.

The Tongass provides vital habitat for eagles, bears, wolves, salmon and countless other species. Alaska Native people rely upon the Tongass's lands and waters for culture, subsistence lifestyles and livelihoods. Visitors from around the world typically travel to the Tongass for world-class recreation, hunting, and sport and commercial fishing. The watersheds of the Tongass produce 80 percent of salmon in Southeast Alaska, and a critical share of the West Coast commercial salmon fishery. In recent years, visitor industry and seafood-related jobs have accounted for 26 percent of employment and generated an annual \$1 billion economic benefit, making a far greater contribution than the less than one percent of employment generated by the timber industry.

Moving to repeal roadless protections is the third Trump administration action this month attacking old-growth trees of the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Service issued a draft proposal to chainsaw 5,000 acres of old growth forest for the [South Revilla timber project](#) on September 4. A week later, the agency proposed another 3,000 acres of old-growth liquidation on heavily logged Prince of Wales Island as part of the [Twin Mountain II timber project](#).

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