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USDA Inspector General report finds Tongass Roadless funds were transferred illegally

Washington — This morning the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of the Inspector General posted its findings ([Inspection Report: 08801-0001-24, Published: 12/15/2020](#)) on whether federal funds were transferred to the State of Alaska illegally for use during the Alaska-specific federal roadless rulemaking process. The finding: they were. From the report:

We found that FS had authority under the National Environmental Policy Act to provide funding to facilitate Alaska's participation in the State-specific rulemaking, as a cooperating agency. **However, the processes FS used to award the \$2 million grant to Alaska did not comply with Federal laws and regulations. Specifically, FS modified an existing Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 grant between FS and Alaska.** FS officials stated that they needed to quickly award this grant to Alaska to facilitate its efforts to develop a State-specific Roadless Rule exemption. **The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 was an Act designated for Federal assistance to State and private forests, not Federal forests such as the Tongass National Forest. Further, FS' decision to issue this grant by modifying an existing grant did not comply with Federal laws and regulations related to competition for discretionary program funding. As a result, we found that stakeholders were unaware that Federal funding was available for the purposes of this grant.** In addition, FS should not issue funding to Alaska under the August 2018 grant agreement.

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

"The Inspector General's report makes clear that the U.S. Forest Service illegally used its authority under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act to allow the state of Alaska to funnel money to pro-roadless exemption causes. Alaska officials wanted to change the rule, so the Forest Service gave the state \$2 million dollars to convince them to do so.

"This report reinforces that approval of a roadless exemption was baked into the process once Governor Dunleavy sold Trump on the idea on Air Force One. But just as distressing as the Forest Service allowing funds to be channeled to timber groups is the fact that other stakeholders, especially Indigenous villages and tribal governments, were not given the same access to grant money. This shows an egregious lack of respect for Alaska Native voices in Southeast Alaska and is further evidence that this has been a completely flawed and illegal process from the beginning driven by timber interests to the exclusion of all others."

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Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. We honor and respect the cultures of Alaska Natives whose way of life remains deeply connected to the state's land, waters, and wildlife. We believe that Alaska's long-term economic future and subsistence traditions are inexorably tied to the health and sound stewardship of its natural resources, which support hunting, fishing, tourism and unrivaled outdoor experiences that are central to Alaskans' quality of life.



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