



January 24, 2021

Tom Vilsack  
Alaska Roadless Rule  
USDA Forest Service  
P.O. Box 21628  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1628

**Re: Proposed Exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule**

Dear Secretary Tom Vilsack,

The undersigned 223 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, local business leaders, and elected officials from Washington State, are writing to request that you fully restore 2001 Roadless Rule protections on the Tongass National Forest and end old-growth logging on the entirety of the forest.

With its old-growth trees effectively capturing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, the Tongass is one of the United States' most important carbon sinks and a critical tool in the fight against climate change. Scientists have estimated that the forest accounts for about 8 percent of the carbon sequestered by all national forests. Protecting the Tongass from old-growth logging will not only preserve that capacity, but avoid releasing carbon currently stored in its trees.

The Tongass National Forest is federal land owned by all Americans and its management matters beyond just Alaska. Here in Washington State, more than most areas, we have a direct connection to Southeast Alaska in many ways. The Tongass National Forest is approximately 500 miles from the northern border of Washington State, the same distance as Boise, ID. Washington is the closest state to Alaska and shares close business, economic and cultural connections. Seattle is the home port for numerous cruise ships heading north through Alaska's Inside Passage to Glacier Bay National Park, immediately adjacent to threatened national forest roadless areas.

Roadless area protections sustain southeast Alaska's ancient forests including thousand-year old Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and western red cedar. Tribal communities currently rely on the Tongass for traditional uses that date back thousands of years and support communities' essential food security. The Tongass is also home to endemic species including brown bears, wolves, eagles, black-tailed deer, and world-class salmon habitat that support commercial and recreational fisheries. It is also home to incredible outdoor recreation opportunities like mountaineering and sea kayaking.

The Tongass is also the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples, and they have been the driving force of the effort to protect the forest. Their way of life is inextricably linked with these lands and waters. They hunt, gather, fish, and harvest medicines in the Tongass that their ancestors have stewarded for more than 10,000 years. Restoring full protections is aligned with the position taken by Tribes in Southeast Alaska and will allow their traditional use of the land to continue.

We share a rich cultural connection to salmon inspired by our local Tribes and natural history similar to our northern Alaska neighbors. The Tongass National Forest produces on average 28% of Alaska's annual commercial salmon catch, and 25% of the entire west coast annual harvest. A significant number of commercial fishing permits held in Southeast and offshore waters in Alaska have their home port in Washington State in places like Seattle's Fisherman's Terminal or Westport on the Olympic coast.

As part of planning for a future beyond large-scale old-growth logging, please also make a sustained federal financial investment in the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy. Operating in full consultation with Tribal governments and local communities, this program will invest in Tribal priorities and will help them stoke the already robust fishing and recreation industries that are currently driving the region's economy.

Please fully restore 2001 Roadless Rule protections on the Tongass National Forest and end large-scale old-growth logging on the entirety of the forest.

Sincerely,

Derek Stanford  
State Senator  
WA State Senate (Dist 1)

Joe Fitzgibbon  
State Representative  
WA State House of Representatives (Dist 34)

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State Representative  
WA State House of Representatives (Dist 1)

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WA State Senate (Dist 36)

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WA State Senate (Dist 11)

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WA State Senate (Dist 38)

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State Senator  
WA State Senate (Dist 21)

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WA State House of Representatives (Dist 38)

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State Senator  
WA State Senate (Dist 23)

Liz Lovelett  
State Senator  
Washington State Senate (Dist 40)

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WA State House of Representatives (Dist 23)

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WA State House of Representatives (Dist 45)

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WA State Senate (Dist 33)

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WA State House of Representatives (Dist 45)

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WA State House of Representatives (Dist 34)

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CC: U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)  
U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA)