



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**
ALASKA

December 17th, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Ms. Vicki Christiansen
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Maintain Protections for the Tongass National Forest - Support for Roadless Rule

Dear Secretary Perdue and Ms. Christiansen,

The Alaska Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (Alaska BHA) appreciates your thoughtful attention to our comments regarding the USDA Forest Service's proposed plan to strip Roadless Rule protections from more than 9 million acres of the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. **Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers strongly encourages you to select Alternative 1, or no action.**

The Tongass National Forest represents one of the most important landscapes for hunting and fishing in Alaska. The region offers intact, unfractured old growth forest that creates some of the most productive wild fish and game habitat left in the world. This habitat is home to Sitka blacktail deer, brown bears, wolves, mountain goats, and all five species of wild Alaskan salmon. The roadless rule protections were crucial in maintaining the productive landscape Alaskans and outdoor recreationists know today. Ensuring this habitat remains healthy and intact is a top priority for Alaska BHA members in Southeast Alaska and beyond. Hunters and anglers from across the state, country, and even the world come to access fish and game from the Tongass's healthy lakes, streams and rivers. Alaska BHA seeks to keep it that way.

Exempting the Tongass from Roadless Rule protections would be a huge leap backward and risk undoing much of the progress gained in recent years. It would turn its back to the region's economic strengths, fishing, tourism and outdoor recreation, which now account for 26% of regional employment and \$2 billion to the local economy. **The Forest Service should abandon**

its proposed exemption and, instead, maintain protections for the Tongass roadless areas by selecting the Alternative 1, “No Action” alternative.

The roadless rule was the result of decades long public policy debates and negotiations that resulted in a compromise that has allowed the region to flourish both environmentally and economically. To throw out the compromise that came from that extensive public process would be an insult to the many hunters, anglers and outdoor recreation advocates who fought for and sacrificed to establish the roadless rule.

Furthermore Alaska BHA is concerned the public process to remove the roadless rule protections has also been woefully inadequate and has thus far failed to incorporate the feedback of local sportsmen, businesses, communities, tribes and residents. If USDA Forest Service does believe changes to the management plan are needed AK BHA encourages a fresh start with a redesigned process that can adequately take the opinions, feedback, criticisms and concerns of Alaskans into consideration.

The process has ignored Alaskan voices and science. It has undermined hard fought historic compromises that used science based standards to create a robust economy and environment. The proposed exemptions to the roadless rule could result in the destruction of some of the most important hunting and fishing habitat in the world. **Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers strongly encourages you to select Alternative 1, or no action.**

Submitted on behalf of Alaska Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.