

**TESTIMONY OF
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Before

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS**

Regarding

PROMULGATION OF STATE-SPECIFIC ROADLESS RULE FOR ALASKA

November 13, 2019

Thank you Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service promulgation of a state-specific roadless rule for the State of Alaska.

In January 2018, the State of Alaska petitioned the Secretary of Agriculture to exempt the Tongass National Forest (Tongass) from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (2001 Roadless Rule). The 2001 Roadless Rule originally applied to approximately 58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands nation-wide. The 2001 Roadless Rule prohibits timber harvest, road construction, and road reconstruction within inventoried roadless areas with certain limited exceptions. Subsequently, the states of Colorado and Idaho petitioned for, and cooperated with, the Forest Service to develop state-specific roadless rules. Consequently, the 2001 Roadless Rule now covers about 44.7 million acres.

In June 2018, the Secretary of Agriculture directed the Forest Service to begin development of an Alaska state-specific roadless rule. On August 30, 2018, the Forest Service published a Notice of Intent (83 FR 44252) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and initiate the public rulemaking process. The intent was to evaluate the regulatory exemption set forth in the State's petition, as well as to evaluate other management options to address infrastructure, timber, energy, mining, access, and transportation needs to promote the health of rural economies in Alaska, while still sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the forest for future generations. The Notice of Intent opened a 45-day public scoping period which ended on October 14, 2018. During this period, the Forest Service conducted 17 public meetings

throughout Southeast Alaska and in Anchorage and Washington, DC. Just over 144,000 public comments (approximately 32,500 form letters, 110,000 petition signatures, and 1,400 unique letters) were received.

On July 30, 2018, the Forest Service sent letters to 32 federally-recognized tribes and 27 Alaska Native corporations within Southeast and Southcentral Alaska initiating government-to-government consultation on the Alaska Roadless Rule. At the request of tribes and Native corporations, the Forest Service has conducted consultations throughout the process, including ten meetings and a recent consultation with the Under Secretary of Agriculture on November 1 and 2, 2019.

In addition, on July 30, 2018, the Forest Service invited 19 Southeast Alaska federally-recognized tribes to participate as cooperating agencies during the rulemaking process. Six federally-recognized tribes agreed to participate as cooperating agencies: Angoon Community Association; Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska; Hoonah Indian Association; Hydaburg Cooperative Association; Organized Village of Kake; and Organized Village of Kasaan. The State of Alaska is also a cooperating agency. The cooperating agencies provided input on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which examines a wide range of alternative approaches to management of roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest.

On September 6, 2018, Governor Walker issued an order establishing the Alaska Citizen Advisory Committee to provide an opportunity for Southeast Alaskans to advise the state of Alaska on the future management of roadless areas on the Tongass. The Committee is comprised of 13 members representing a diversity of perspectives, and was tasked with developing a report to provide recommendations informing State of Alaska input to the rulemaking.

The DEIS analyzed six alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and the full-exemption alternative requested by the State of Alaska (Alternative 6). The other four alternatives (Alternatives 2-5) were developed based on information obtained from the public and/or cooperating agency input. For example: a provision is provided for removal of trees for Alaska Native customary and traditional uses in Alternatives 2-5 based on input from tribes and

a roadless management category was added to Alternative 3 around specific communities that support small scale timber harvesting.

The Forest Service worked diligently to develop the DEIS using the best available information to evaluate and compare the effects of the alternatives. To the extent practicable, the DEIS relied on analyses completed in 2016 for the Tongass Forest Plan amendment because they provide recent and detailed examinations of roadless management issues on the Forest. Neither the proposed Alaska roadless rule, nor any alternative examined in the DEIS, would change the transition to a predominately young-growth timber program or the projected timber harvest levels. The proposed rule does not authorize any ground-disturbing activities, which would need to comply with the Tongass forest plan as well as undergo appropriate environmental analyses and public input if they were proposed.

The Secretary of Agriculture identified the full exemption alternative (Alternative 6) as the preferred alternative in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and DEIS. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Notice of Availability of the DEIS were published in the Federal Register on October 17 and 18, 2019, respectively. This initiated a 60 day public comment period. Comments are being solicited on all alternatives, and draft rule language for each alternative is included for public comment. In addition, 19 public meetings are being held throughout Southeast Alaska, Anchorage, and Washington, DC in November to ensure a robust public engagement process.

We appreciate the Committee's interest in this effort and I look forward to answering your questions.