



USDA Forest Service Seeks Public Comment on Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Alternatives to a Proposed Alaska Roadless Rule

Development of a proposed state-specific rule is in response to a petition from the State of Alaska

JUNEAU, ALASKA, Oct. 15, 2019 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture is seeking public comment on a draft environmental impact statement offering a range of alternatives to roadless management and a proposed Alaska Roadless Rule. If adopted, the proposed rule would exempt the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule.

The USDA Forest Service will publish the documents in the [Federal Register](#) this week. The publication will begin a 60-day public comment period on the proposed rule, and on each alternative outlined in the draft environmental impact statement.

The draft environmental impact statement, prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act, provides an analysis of six alternatives, which are options, choices, or courses of action related to roadless management in Alaska. The alternatives range from no action to the removal of the Tongass from the 2001 Roadless Rule. The Department has identified Alternative 6, which is a full exemption, as the preferred alternative at this time. The full range of options are:

- Alternative 1 takes no action and would leave all of Alaska under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including the Tongass National Forest.
- Alternative 2 provides regulatory protection for the majority (89%) of key watersheds inside roadless areas and would convert 18,000 old-growth acres and 10,000 young-growth acres previously identified as unsuitable timber lands to suitable timber lands.
- Alternative 3 provides regulatory protections for all key watersheds inside and outside roadless areas, creates a community priority roadless designation that allows for recreational development and timber sales under 1 million board feet, and would convert 76,000 old-growth acres and 14,000 young-growth acres previously identified as unsuitable timber lands to suitable timber lands.

- Alternative 4 restricts harvest and road-building activities in scenic viewsheds and most (88%) key watersheds inside roadless areas and would convert 158,000 old-growth acres and 15,000 young-growth acres previously identified as unsuitable timber lands to suitable timber lands.
- Alternative 5 would remove 2.3 million acres from roadless area designation, protects some (59%) key watersheds, and would convert 165,000 old-growth acres and 17,000 young-growth acres previously identified as unsuitable timber lands to suitable timber lands.
- Alternative 6 (preferred) would exempt the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule and is fully responsive to the State of Alaska's petition. The alternative would remove all 9.2 million acres of inventoried roadless acres and would convert 165,000 old-growth acres and 20,000 young-growth acres previously identified as unsuitable timber lands to suitable timber lands. Conservation of roadless values would be achieved through other means, including the Tongass Land Management Plan. This is specific to the Tongass National Forest. The Chugach National Forest would remain under the 2001 Roadless Rule.

The Forest Service is scheduling a series of public meetings and subsistence hearings. A list of those meeting locations will be available on the [Alaska Roadless Rule project website](#).

The public has until midnight Alaska time on Dec. 17, 2019, to submit comments on the documents. The documents are posted in the Federal Register and on the agency's Alaska Roadless Rule website.

These are the ways the public can submit written comments once the notice is published:

- Web: www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54511
- Email: akroadlessrule@fs.fed.us
- Mail: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Alaska Roadless Rule, P.O. Box 21628, Juneau, Alaska, 99802
- Fax: 907-586-7852
- In-person delivery to Forest Service, 709 W. 9th Street, Room 535B, Juneau, Alaska 99801

Written comments will help inform USDA as it moves toward a final decision about an Alaska-specific roadless rule. The Secretary of Agriculture is expected to make a final decision by June 2020.

The Tongass stretches over the 500-mile-long Southeast Alaska Panhandle and covers 80 percent of the land. It is rich in natural resources and cultural heritage. Developed areas cover about 8 percent of the land. There are 32 communities, including the state capitol of Juneau, in Southeast Alaska.

News media inquiries should be made to the Forest Service Press Desk at pressoffice@fs.fed.us or call 202-205-1134.

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