

September 18, 2018

Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Request for 30-day Extension of Scoping Period and Washington State public meeting for Tongass National Forest Roadless Area Rulemaking

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations and local business leaders and elected officials from Washington State, we are writing to request an extended comment period and a public meeting in Washington State as part of the current public comment period for a proposed state-specific rule that could alter existing roadless area protections in the Tongass National Forest.

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 a close business, economic and cultural connections. On Alaska Airlines alone there are 24 daily nonstop flights between Seattle and the southeast Alaska communities of Sitka, Ketchikan and Juneau.

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.

Additionally, five major cruise lines, including Celebrity, Princess, Carnival, Norwegian and Holland America, offer 80 cruises departing from Seattle to the inside passage, the Tongass National Forest and Glacier Bay National Park each summer. The Tongass National Forest and its roadless areas are a central draw and attraction to visitation from Washingtonians and other tourists from around the country and the world. The forest watersheds, wildlife habitat and scenery directly support the visitor experience to nearby national park areas. According to the Cruise Lines International Association, direct expenditures related to cruises from Seattle generated total economic impacts of 18,129 jobs and \$949 million in income throughout the Washington economy during 2016.¹

The Tongass National Forest is nationally renowned for its extraordinary temperate rainforests, stunning scenery, abundant salmon populations, and superlative wildlands. More than one million people from across the U.S. commented in favor of protecting all 9.3 million acres of Tongass National Forest inventoried roadless areas during the rulemaking process for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) in 2000. At the time, the rulemaking process for the Roadless Rule was the largest in the

¹ [The Contribution of the International Cruise Industry to the U.S Economy in 2016](#), August 2017

history of the federal government, including more than a million comments and 600 public meetings throughout Alaska and the lower 48 states.

Since then, public appreciation of the roadless area values of the Tongass has only grown, as evidenced by the impressive growth of the tourist industry in southeast Alaska. We believe that additional time is needed to inform the public that the Forest Service is considering changes in the Roadless Rule that could drastically impact some of the nation's greatest forests and wildlands. These could have significant long term economic impacts to Washington State.

We request the following steps to ensure that there is adequate public input and public process related to this proposed rulemaking for roadless areas within Tongass National Forest:

- The public comment period be extended 30 days for a total comment period of 75 days and that the Forest Service provide additional public hearings during the scoping process.
- We strongly urge the Forest Service to conduct additional public meetings outside of Alaska. Currently, the agency is only planning one meeting in the lower 48 – in Washington DC at a yet-to-be-determined date. The Forest Service should at a minimum hold a public meeting in Seattle, as the Environmental Protection Agency did for a rulemaking around the Pebble Mine in Alaska.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments focused on ensuring that this issue receives adequate and robust public input.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
Washington Wild

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Seattle City Council

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Councilmember
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CC: Chris French, acting deputy chief, USDA Forest Service