



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

DEC 26 2019

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

Thank you for your letter of November 12, 2019, cosigned by your colleagues, requesting an extension of the comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Alaska state-specific roadless rulemaking process being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USDA), and the scheduling of additional public information meetings.

The Forest Service conducted robust and extensive public outreach, provided resources for participation and collaboration, and made accommodations as needed to provide and enhance public engagement since the onset of the Alaska state-specific roadless rulemaking. The Forest Service met and exceeded both the spirit and letter of laws and regulations governing public engagement.

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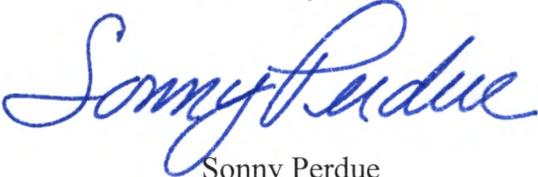
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
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Thank you for your ongoing interest in the management of the Tongass National Forest. I appreciate your engagement and participation in this process. A similar response is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



Sonny Perdue
Secretary



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

DEC 26 2019

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Waters, Oceans
and Wildlife
U.S. House of Representatives
1331 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Huffman:

Thank you for your letter of November 12, 2019, cosigned by your colleagues, requesting an extension of the comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Alaska state-specific roadless rulemaking process being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USDA), and the scheduling of additional public information meetings.

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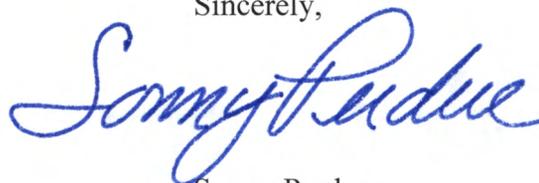
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Secretary



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Washington, D.C. 20250

DEC. 26 2019

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Chair
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests
and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
1328 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Haaland:

Thank you for your letter of November 12, 2019, cosigned by your colleagues, requesting an extension of the comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Alaska state-specific roadless rulemaking process being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USDA), and the scheduling of additional public information meetings.

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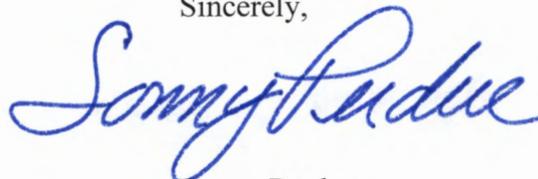
The Honorable Debra Haaland
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Sonny Perdue
Secretary



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Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

DEC 26 2019

The Honorable Diana DeGette
U.S. House of Representatives
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman DeGette:

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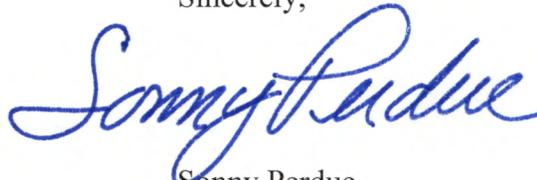
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DEC 26 2019

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
Chair
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1522 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lowenthal:

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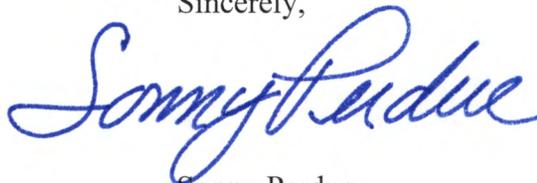
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Sincerely,

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Sonny Perdue
Secretary



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

DEC 26 2019

The Honorable Ruben Gallego
Chair
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of
the United States
U.S. House of Representatives
1331 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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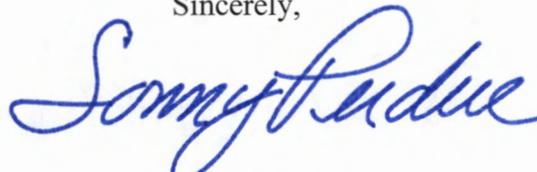
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Sonny Perdue
Secretary

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

November 12, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On October 18, 2019, the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and proposed rule that would exempt the Tongass National Forest (Tongass) in the State of Alaska from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule). Considering the sensitivity of the resources involved, the numerous concerns raised by affected stakeholders, and the broad range of potential adverse impacts, we request that you extend the public comment period for the DEIS on the rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas by at least an additional 60 days. In addition, to allow for adequate and meaningful public involvement regarding the management of these nationally significant natural resources, we request that the Forest Service schedule additional public hearings and meetings across the lower-48, or the conterminous United States.

As you know, the Roadless Rule was adopted in 2001 to preserve 58.5 million acres of national forest wildland – limiting costly and environmentally-damaging roadbuilding and logging while protecting taxpayers and preserving wild, high conservation value lands in 39 states. By repealing Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass, this proposed rulemaking would directly threaten one of the world's largest tracts of temperate old-growth rainforest, our country's single most important national forest for climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration, and a diversity of unique wildlife habitats and ecosystems that are not found anywhere else in the National Forest System.

In addition to the various potential environmental impacts, this proposal would also have drastic impacts for Alaska Native tribes, corporations, and individuals, as well as other residents and subsistence users of the Tongass. Since time immemorial, Alaska Natives have lived in the Tongass, relying on the forest ecosystem and its abundant fisheries and wildlife. Today, many Alaska Native communities continue to depend upon the Tongass for their customary and traditional uses – acknowledging many of the Tongass' roadless areas as sacred and irreplaceable.

Overall in Southeast Alaska, nearly one-quarter of residents make a living in the tourism and fishing industries – both of which depend on a healthy, protected forest. It is critical that these affected communities are given a meaningful opportunity to comment on this proposal. When considering the variety of time constraints these stakeholders operate under, including differing

periods of peak employment, cultural activities, and other commitments, as well as the remote locations of some of the most seriously affected individuals, it is clear that a single 60-day public comment period provides a completely unrealistic timeframe for meaningful and adequate public input.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) held more than 400 public meetings across the country as part of the 2001 Roadless Rule rulemaking process. The USDA Forest Service has a responsibility to similarly ensure adequate opportunities for the public to weigh in on this proposed rewrite – which would affect public lands belonging to all Americans – by scheduling additional public meetings in Alaska and across the lower-48 states.

Considering the complex nature of, and widespread local and national interests likely to be affected by this proposal, we strongly urge that you provide a minimum of 120-days for public comment on the proposed rule and DEIS and schedule additional public hearings in the lower-48 states to enable adequate and meaningful public participation regarding the management of these nationally significant natural resources.

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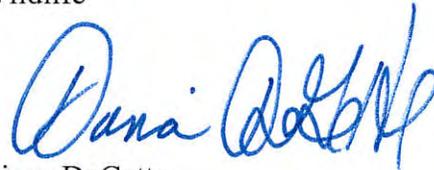
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Diana DeGette
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