Topic: State of Alaska Roadless Petition – Public Support
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Issue Summary: The Governor of Alaska recently petitioned the Secretary for rulemaking on the applicability of the 2001 Roadless Rule in Alaska, with a focus on the Tongass National Forest. The petition also asked for a amendment or revision of the Tongass National Forest Plan.A Tongass roadless rulemaking or plan decision will be controversial and would undoubtedly be litigated. The Governor has indicated that he would like us to use an open and transparent process, and that he has been impressed with the Tongass Advisory Committee (TAC) (a past FACA committee).

Background: In Alaska, 93% of National Forest lands are either designated Wilderness (26%) or Inventoried Roadless Area (67%). Both of these designations prohibit road construction and road reconstruction, limit or prohibit timber harvesting, and constrain other forest management activities. Associate Deputy Chief French has interviewed more than 55 major stakeholders in Southeast Alaska, participated in a public forum with Senator Murkowski, and has attended several field forums to determine the views of various stakeholders on the State's petition.

Supporting Alaska's Petition: Generally, elected officials, extractive industries, some native corporations, and economic development organizations in Southeast Alaska strongly support the state's petition. These groups see the application of the 2001 Roadless Rule to Alaska as a "taking" under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). In their view, protecting lands under this rule limits the region's sustainable timber base, its access to minerals, its ability to develop hydroelectric facilities and other infrastructure (such as cell phone towers), and its ability to use roads to connect 30+ communities.

Against Alaska's Petition: Environmental, conservation, backcountry outfitter guides, and fishing organizations are generally strongly opposed to Alaska's petition. Some local native corporations are also opposed. They believe that providing Alaska an exemption to the rule would lead to an expansion of old growth timber harvesting, reduce protection for species and ecosystems, and harm the tourism and fishing industries in southeast Alaska. They view the states petition as "out of touch" with most Alaskans and the American people. They report major organizations, such as the Pew Charitable Trust, are pouring money into Alaska to fight the potential rule making. However, they are less opposed to a state-specific or Tongass-specific roadless rule.

Neutral on Alaska's Petition: The tourism and sightseeing industry, the biggest economic growth area of southeast Alaska, is cautious. This industry depends on "wild areas" for its business (cruise ships, ecotourism) but recognizes that roadless areas can limit its customers' access to wild areas. The industry does not support expanded timber harvesting, but recognizes that the extractive industries provide the highest-paying, year-round jobs.

Collaborative Fatigue: After the 2016 Forest Plan Amendment, most moderate parties from the extractive industries and conservation groups report that they spent a lot of capital on the TAC and are not likely going to be a part of a roadless rule collaborative group. This provides challenges to using a FACA or other group similar to the Idaho and Colorado Roadless rules.

Recommendation: Given the polarity of the issues and collaborative fatigue, if your decision is to proceed with a rulemaking it may be most efficient to pursue a more traditional public hearing approach, including a FACA

committee. It will take at least six months to stand up a FACA committee. Another option for a rulemaking, would be for the agency to support using a state-sponsored alternative that is based on upon a state-sponsored collaborative group. This idea is supported by the State of Alaska.