



**DELIBERATIVE, PRE-DECISIONAL, FOR INTERNAL COORDINATION ONLY**

**Topic:** Summary of Comments after publication of FEIS for Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas

**Date:** October 26, 2020

**Contact:** Chris French

**Phone:** 202-205-1689

**Email:** chris.french@usda.gov

**Background:** In August 2018, USDA initiated an EIS and public rulemaking process to address management of inventoried roadless areas within Alaska's National forests. The Final Environmental Impact Statement for Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas was published in September 2020. Written public comments that were received over the course of 30 days following the EIS publication are summarized below. They echo input received and considered during the official comment periods.

**Summary:** Approximately 42,000 comment letters were received during the 30-day period following publication of the FEIS. The majority of the letters received (41,800) were based on a set of form letters.

**Themes from Comments Received**

Most of the comments received did not indicate support for the proposed rule. Examples are below.

- Comparing economics impacts in Alaska for recreation/tourism/fishing versus timber
- Halt removal of protections on the Tongass
- Concern about anticipated road-building, oil exploration and logging impacts to recreation and associated economic impacts; air quality; old growth; solitude; economy and Forest Service Budget (subsidization); economic diversification for Alaska Panhandle; marine and terrestrial wildlife and habitat fragmentation; sacred sites and cultural resources known and not yet identified; areas not yet recovered from logging prior to the roadless rule; climate change from deforestation and forest degradation contributing to greenhouse gas pollution; and clean water, fisheries and associated economic impacts from pollution of rivers and streams
- Impacts to carbon sequestration and climate change
- Impacts to the rights, health and way-of-life of Indigenous Communities
- Tribal, cooperator and public involvement concerns included the perception of disregarding Tribal input, the need to consider input from beyond the state of Alaska, and the need to decide based on the majority of input
- Need for untouched wild places for future generations
- Concern about precedent for other National Forests' Roadless Areas
- Biological value outweighs value of extracted resources (ex. timber)

Supportive comments referred to the need for more public access, especially for individuals with mobility challenges.

In addition to comments on the publication of the Rulemaking for Alaska Roadless Areas FEIS the following requests were made:

- Requests for a new planning process study for the Tongass (ex. Traditional Homelands Conservation Rule) to protect important areas for tribal people that includes full documentation and supports traditional uses including food, medicine and wellbeing;
- requests for expanding existing roadless;
- requests to co-sponsor the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (HR 3742); and
- requests to make the Alaska Roadless Rule Law.

**Recommendation:** Information only. To inform the decision maker for the Record of Decision and Final Rule.

