

## OPENING STATEMENT

**Thank you, Chair Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher, for the opportunity to testify in support of my bill, the Roadless Area Conservation Act.**

**This bill is straightforward: it codifies the Department of Agriculture’s Roadless Area Conservation Rule and reaffirms existing protections for inventoried roadless areas.**

**Since its finalization in 2001, the Roadless Rule has been an effective and flexible tool for forest management.**

**The rule designates some of the most pristine parts of our National Forests as “inventoried roadless areas” and protects those areas from harmful logging and road construction, while providing exceptions for hazardous fuels treatment, road safety projects, and state-specific regulations such as those in Idaho and Colorado.**

**This common-sense regulation has been successful under administrations from both parties for nearly two decades until the Trump Administration made the dangerous and illogical decision to roll back protections Roadless Rule protections in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.**

**The Trump administration’s decision would have allowed the destruction of 9 million acres of old-growth forest in southeast Alaska and devastated the local economy which relies heavily on tourism and fishing.**

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**We must pass the Roadless Area Conservation Act to protect Tongass National Forest, prevent this kind of reckless action by future administrations, and show Congress' support for protecting our forests.**

**Both my bill and this hearing are especially timely given the Roadless Rule's importance to addressing many pressing climate priorities- including clean water and carbon sequestration.**

**Road building and roads can severely impair watershed conditions, and roadless areas play a key role delivering clean, affordable drinking water to at least 354 communities across the country.**

**Roadless areas are also tools for carbon capture.**

**This is especially true of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, which stores nearly 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide – nearly 2 times what the United States emits annually by burning fossil fuels.**

**I also want to address concerns around the Roadless Rule's impact on wildfire risk.**

**Multiple studies have shown that roads, rather than reducing the threat of wildfire, actually increase the risk of wildfire ignitions- regardless of whether those wildfires are human-caused or natural.**

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**In fact, wildfire-ignition density is highest within 250 meters of roads and decreases the further away you get.**

**By protecting forest land from the increased ignition risk associated with roads, in combination with existing exceptions to the Roadless rule for fire management, codifying this rule would actually help to combat wildfire risk.**

**Finally, the Roadless rule is good for local economies.**

**The increased recreation opportunities in Roadless areas compared to wilderness areas include mountain biking, skiing, and some ATV trail access.**

**In total, roadless areas provide around \$8.5 billion in recreation and passive use benefits, often in the form of visitor spending in gateway communities for supplies, meals, and lodging.**

**I'll close by sharing that support for roadless area protections spans geography and political party.**

**Roadless areas are recognized in the Forest Service's ten-year wildfire plan, the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, and the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy.**

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**Exceptions for protections for roadless areas are even specifically included in Ranking Member Westerman's flagship legislation, both the Resilient Federal Forests Act and the Trillion Trees Act.**

**In a 2019 poll, three out of four respondents said they supported keeping roadless forest protections, while only 16% oppose it.**

**The Roadless rule is effective environmental policy that was carried out on a bipartisan basis until interference from the Trump administration that ignored science and economics.**

**Codifying the Roadless Rule in response to this effort is not a radical step, but a needed affirmation of our commitment to protect our pristine National Forests for future generations.**

**I look forward to working with the committee and the administration to move this legislation forward.**

**Thank you, and I yield back.**