

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Oversight Hearing
Opening Statement
November 13, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands oversight hearing on the impacts of the recently proposed Alaska Roadless Exemption.**

- **I would also like to thank our witnesses, many of whom have traveled great distances to share their insights with us today.**

- **I appreciate my colleague Ranking Member Young for being here today.**

- **I know that when it comes to Alaska's public lands, you have a unique perspective backed by significant experience.**

- **While we may often disagree, today's hearing is a necessary and relevant exercise of our right as a coequal branch of government to oversee the actions of the Executive Branch, and not a personal or political attack.**

- **This is especially true when there are so many legitimate questions about why this rulemaking is necessary, how federal funds have been used, who is making the decisions about the management of these public resources and, most important to me, the incorporation of science and public input – especially from the tribes participating as cooperating agencies.**
- **For nearly 20 years, the Roadless Rule has provided a balanced and flexible approach to protecting the clean water, wildlife, recreation, and cultural values found in undeveloped national forests across the nation.**
- **This commonsense safeguard has helped rein in decades of environmentally destructive road building and clear-cut logging, but it has also helped protect many areas considered sacred by indigenous communities.**
- **This is especially true in Southeast Alaska, where the Roadless Rule has protected lands that Alaska Natives have cared for and depended upon since time immemorial.**

- **Unfortunately, the current administration has decided to push forward a plan that completely exempts the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule, ignoring the fact Alaska's roadless areas contain countless traditional, cultural, spiritual, and subsistence values for the dozens of indigenous communities that call the Tongass home.**
- **This vast old-growth ecosystem supports world class salmon spawning waterways and other wildlife habitat that underpin the region's multi-billion-dollar fishing and tourism industries.**
- **And, as part of the largest intact temperate rainforest on earth, the Tongass also plays a vital role in climate change mitigation and resiliency by storing more than 8 percent of all carbon stored in our National Forest System.**
- **Unfortunately, from what I have heard so far, it is hard to see this rulemaking as anything other than an effort to benefit a small subset of special interests at the expense of all other stakeholders in the region.**

- **During my time in Congress, this administration's priorities have been made painfully clear – industry interests take precedence over just about anything else...**
- **Whether that be climate change mitigation, protecting critical wildlife habitat, preserving unique and iconic landscapes, safeguarding local communities, or protecting our country's shared heritage.**
- **The Alaska Roadless Exemption is only the latest example of this administration's disregard for the environment and indigenous communities.**
- **The Alaska Roadless Exemption appears to cede entirely to the demands of the state, at least in part because of the direct involvement of a President who is happy to disregard the law, science, and public input.**
- **This is especially concerning when it appears there is such strong local opposition from tribes and others who support keeping the Roadless Rule in place in the Tongass.**
- **Opening currently protected areas to new roadbuilding and clear-cut logging would have implications that reach far beyond Alaska.**

- **The Tongass National Forest alone provides habitat for about a quarter of the salmon caught in Alaska and off the entire west coast.**
- **The Tongass is our most important national forest for climate change, which is disproportionately affecting Alaskan native communities.**
- **And as this region transitions away from old-growth logging, there has been a boom in tourism, with nearly 1.5 million people travelling to Southeast Alaska each year to hunt, fish, and experience this world renown ecosystem.**
- **We know how subsidized logging harmed this area in the past. I hope we can at least agree that we need to make sure an Alaska Roadless Exemption for the future isn't actually a step backwards.**