

Opening Statement for Ranking Member Young
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing on “Roads to Ruin: Examining the Impacts of Removing
National Forest Roadless Protections.”

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Today, we meet to discuss the Trump Administration’s proposal to fully exempt the Tongass National Forest from the misguided Roadless Rule, which has been disastrous for Alaska. This a positive change that reflects the will of our entire Congressional delegation, our governor, and most importantly, the people of Alaska. It will enable better land management and responsible opportunities for economic growth, while ensuring proper stewardship and protection of the region’s rich natural resources.

I have been proud to represent the people of Alaska, and their interests in Congress for the

last 46 years. I was in Congress when the Clinton administration, during the last days of his presidency, imposed the burdensome Roadless Rule over millions of acres of National Forest land. This sweeping environmental regulation created permanent prohibitions on road building, timber harvesting and construction. In the last 18 years it has significantly limited access to national forests and has severely hampered economic opportunities for local communities that live in and rely on these public lands.

The Roadless Rule has hit my state of Alaska especially hard, with over 15 million acres designated as roadless areas in the state's

two national forests. 9.7 million of those acres are in the Tongass, which is the largest National forest in the United States.

Located in southeast Alaska, the forest makes up a vast majority of the land in the area. Much of the land is already under strict restrictions, unrelated to the roadless rule, with wilderness, national monuments and other protective designations covering roughly 80 percent of the forest.

The roadless rule has led to substantial access issues and economic hardship for the people in Southeast Alaska. The one-size-fits-all rule has caused significant decline for all aspects of the region's natural resources-

dependent economy including timber, tourism, recreation, mining, and renewable energy.

The hearing title for today's hearing is "*Roads to Ruin.*" This ridiculous title is willfully misleading and wholly untrue. My friends on the other side of the aisle appear poised to shamefully allege that this move by the Trump administration presents grave dangers to millions of acres of pristine ecosystem, while ignoring the significant environmental protections that remain in place.

The truth is that this is a very reasonable exemption that has overwhelming state and local support. The Forest Service has done a very thorough evaluation of this issue, and their

conclusions are sound. This is a common-sense move that will correctly return many important management decisions back to the Forest Service which will bolster the long-term health of the forest and the communities that rely upon its rich natural resources.

I have always said that the Roadless Rule should have never been applied to Alaska, and with this move, it is clear that this Administration has once again proven their commitment to putting people and their livelihoods first. This decision will open up more of the region to potential development to provide opportunities for tourism, fishing, and

wildlife viewing as well as mining, energy development, and timber.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to their testimony.