

April 14th, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: The Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Dear Mr. President:

We write to applaud your commitment to protecting the remaining undeveloped and roadless areas within the national forests of the United States and to urge you to take early, decisive action to defend, embrace, and implement the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) on all acres that it covers. As scientists working in natural resource-related disciplines including biology, forest ecology, climatology, geology, aquatic ecology, fisheries, soil science, and natural resource management, we are greatly concerned about the continuing loss and fragmentation of the nation's forests.

The final Roadless Area Conservation Rule, issued January 12, 2001, was an important step towards preserving the invaluable ecological benefits that intact forests provide. Now, as the realities of global climate change become ever more apparent, the critical need to preserve these last remaining, intact roadless areas within the national forests could not be more urgent. The importance of maintaining large terrestrial carbon stores, particularly in forests, is swiftly being recognized as a critical element in addressing climate change. To avoid climate catastrophe we must reverse global deforestation, which contributes 20 percent of the world's climate pollution and impoverishes the land of critical refugia for the world's already threatened biodiversity.

Scientific research has amply documented the greater health and resiliency of intact forest ecosystems versus those disturbed by roads and logging. Less disturbed forests are less susceptible to tree diseases, insect attacks, and invasions from non-native species, and less likely to have suffered the adverse effects of fire suppression. These healthier ecosystems are in turn more able to withstand the effects of global climate change and act as refugia for sensitive wildlife and plant species, many of which are vulnerable to extirpation in more developed areas. Thus, intact forests can serve as vital reservoirs and safety nets, as surrounding landscapes become genetically impoverished and fragmented, greatly impeding species' abilities to adapt to the increasing stress of global warming.

Intact forests play an important role in the function of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. They are spared the potentially massive soil erosion that can accompany road building and logging, which fouls streams and rivers. As a result, roadless areas in our national forests contain some of the most intact aquatic ecosystems in the country, including some of the healthiest salmon stocks. Intact forests provide direct watershed benefits to people by reducing flood threats and supplying clean sources of drinking water. In fact, National Forests and Grasslands are the largest single source of water in the continental U.S., contributing nearly 20

percent of the Nation's water supply¹.

It is particularly important that immediate action be taken before recently planned development goes forward in roadless areas, both permanently degrading these ecosystems and setting a dangerous precedent. A prime example of this is the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Our largest expanse of intact forest, and the heart of the world's remaining coastal rainforest, the Tongass represents one of North America's largest carbon sinks, some of the richest, most biologically productive land on earth, and constitutes 30 percent of the world's unlogged coastal temperate rainforest². Its old-growth trees live 200 to 700 years, with yellow cedar living 1,000 years or more. These large expanses of ancient forest are critical to maintaining a wide variety of wildlife, including the world's largest concentration of bald eagles³, endemic plants and animals like the Alexander Archipelago wolf, and more grizzly bears per square mile than anywhere on the globe⁴. Despite this, new logging could begin in Tongass roadless areas as soon as this Spring under a "temporary" exemption issued by the Bush administration.

Considering all of the above reasons, it is imperative that early action be taken in the Tongass—and throughout the country—to uphold the Roadless Rule. Doing so will help preserve the important ecological benefits of the remaining undeveloped 30% of our national forests (an area that represents only 2% of the country's land area).

Again, we thank you for your pledge to revitalize our country's leadership in addressing critical environmental issues here and abroad and urge you to implement and vigorously administer the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Thank you for considering our views on this matter of vital importance to the nation's ecological health.

Respectfully yours,

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¹ USDA Forest Service. "Healthy Waters Fact Sheet". 2007.

http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/resources/pubs/watershed/waterfacts_101907.pdf (December 9, 2008)

² Kramer, M., A.J. Hansen, M.L. Taper, E.J. Kissinger. 2001. ABIOTIC CONTROLS ON LONG-TERM WINDTHROW DISTURBANCE AND TEMPERATE RAIN FOREST DYNAMICS IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA. *Ecology*. **82(10)**: 2749-2768 <http://www.homepage.montana.edu/~hansen/documents/downloadables/ecology.pdf> ;

³ USDA Tongass SEIS. February 2003. Vol. 1. Page 178

⁴ USDA Tongass SEIS. February 2003. Vol. 1. Page 177 and

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/districts/admiralty/fwe/index.shtml>

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