

Tongass National Forest

The crown jewel of our national forest system, the Tongass National Forest stretches the length of Alaska's southeastern panhandle and is home to some of America's most iconic and precious wildlife. Much of its 17 million acres lies within the Alexander Archipelago, a 500-mile chain of islands ranging from small, rocky reefs to huge forested landmasses.



Comprised of towering spruce, hemlock, yellow and red cedar, these ancient forests soar over 200 feet high, their broad, moss-draped limbs supporting some of the richest, most biologically productive land on earth. Old-growth trees in the Tongass live 200 to 700 years and they provide habitat to the bald eagles, grizzly bears, world class salmon runs, and countless migratory fowl.

Though it remains the heart of the earth's largest, intact temperate rainforest, a half-century of subsidized logging and road-building has decimated roughly a million acres of its richest old growth. Over 5,000 miles of logging roads cut through the Tongass. Built with taxpayer subsidies and inaccessible to passenger cars, the vast majority of these are abandoned logging roads that the Forest Service cannot afford to maintain. Left to crumble, they degrade wildlife habitat, despoil forest streams and clog precious fish spawning grounds with silty run-off.

Today, only about 5 million acres of old growth remain. Yet the Forest Service wants taxpayers to continue subsidizing logging companies to tear down these trees and all the life they support. Although the 2001 Roadless Rule halted logging and road construction in all wild national forests, the Bush administration is ploughing ahead with plans for more clearcutting and destructive road-building in roadless portions of the Tongass, claiming to have exempted it in a 2003 edict of dubious legality.

To date, taxpayers have paid nearly a billion dollars underwriting the destruction of this unique landscape which rightfully belongs to them. Abandoning plans to increase logging in the Tongass would ensure this vital part of our natural heritage will remain to be enjoyed by our children and grandchildren.



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FAST FACTS

Where: Southeastern Alaska, United States

What's at stake: The heart of the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world; important habitat for grizzly bear, bald eagles, and salmon.

Threatened by: Clearcut logging

Animals include: Grizzly bear, bald eagle, coho salmon, humpback whale, gray wolf

Action requested: Protect the Tongass National Forest's last remaining roadless areas and urge the Forest Service to abandon efforts to increase wasteful logging in America's rainforest