

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

It was with tremendous dismay that we learned of your Administration's decision to temporarily exempt the Tongass National Forest from the protection of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule until a final regulation is in effect for Alaska. When that rule is finalized, we urge you to ensure that the Tongass is protected as specified in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule of January 12, 2001.

The Tongass National Forest is the largest remaining old-growth temperate rainforest in the world, spanning nearly 17 million acres. It is a place of natural beauty, a crown jewel of America's national forests. Its conservation is very much in the interest of the American people. The Tongass National Forest contains glaciers and mountains, as well as groves of hemlock and cedar that grow to be over 200 feet tall. These trees can live as long as 1,000 years. Animal species that thrive here include brown bears, bald eagles, gray wolves, wolverines and salmon.

As you know, the Roadless Rule prohibits road building and most commercial logging in pristine forest areas nationwide. Last summer, your Administration sought comment on a proposal to exempt the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule. Nearly a quarter of a million public comments were delivered to the Forest Service; 99 percent of these comments supported maintaining protection for the Tongass. A growing diversity of voices – including large corporations, more than 450 gun clubs nationwide, the Garden Clubs of America, and the Forest Roads Working Group – are in favor of protection.

The Forest Service claims that "only" 300,000 acres of our nation's largest forest will be impacted by roads and timber sales if the Tongass is exempted from the Roadless Rule. The fact is that an industrial-scale footprint of clearcuts and road-building will be left across 2.6 million acres of the rainforest, and will scar this once pristine forest. Furthermore, two-thirds of the Tongass is rock, ice, muskeg, and scrub forest. Timber sales are concentrated in the 4 percent of the forest that contain the largest, most productive old growth trees, which are the ecological heart of the forest. The claim that most of the forest will not be affected is a false one, since the remaining trees of greatest value will be targeted under this exemption.

Once again, we strongly urge you to heed public sentiment and provide roadless area protection for the Tongass National Forest.

Sincerely,

Barbara Boyer
Nurrell D. Feingold
Bill Nelson

Mania Cantwell
Jack Reed
Gore Hart

Robert A. Nicholas

John [unclear]
Paul [unclear]

John [unclear]
Don Wynn

Frank R. Santenberg
Bob [unclear]

Charles Schreyer
Barbara [unclear]
John Edwards

Patrick Leahy
Hillary Rodham Clinton

John D. M.
Tom F. Kelly
Patty Murray

Dick Dri

Ed Hardy

Max Payne

Tongass Roadless Letter

Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Russell D. Feingold
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Bill Nelson
Senator Tom Harkin
Senator Barbara A. Mikulski
Senator Joseph I. Lieberman
Senator Jon S. Corzine
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Paul S. Sarbanes
Senator Charles E. Schumer
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Senator Bob Graham
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