



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

**The National Congress of American Indians
Resolution #ABQ-19-029**

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TITLE: Oppose Rulemaking that Weakens or Eliminates Protections of the Roadless Rule within Tribal Traditional Territories and Support the ‘No-Action Alternative’ in the Alaska-Specific Roadless Rulemaking

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, tribes of Alaska’s southeast region are federally recognized Indian tribes under federal law and these tribes’ traditional territory includes homelands within and around the Tongass National Forest; and

WHEREAS, protection of the inherent right to harvest and use tribal traditional and customary foods requires careful cultural stewardship and protection of tribal traditional environmental and natural resources; and

WHEREAS, indigenous peoples’ longstanding care of the ancestral lands now classified as “inventoried roadless areas” (IRA) within the Tongass National Forest has been in place for millennia and these lands not only provide indigenous people with food, they essentially define who we are and where we come from; and

WHEREAS, inventoried roadless areas protect healthy watersheds that ensure a clean drinking water for our tribal citizens and inventoried roadless areas contain many sites sacred to tribal citizens who use these roadless areas for spiritual, religious, and traditional practices and other customary uses and activities; and

WHEREAS, inventoried roadless areas conserve natural diversity and help ensure the continued protection of indigenous fish and wildlife habitat as it relates to our spiritual, social, nutritional, and ecological values; and

WHEREAS, given Southeast Alaska's cool wet weather, the amount of stored carbon in intact old-growth forest and soils, the Tongass National Forest represents one of the highest carbon stores in the world; and

WHEREAS, the conservation of intact inventoried roadless areas in, for example, the Tongass National Forest – the largest temperate rainforest in the United States – is essential for slowing down climate change throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, according to the State of Alaska's economic experts, Tongass National Forest timber is uncompetitive because of permanent and fundamental changes in global timber markets, high labor costs, distance from markets, and less expensive substitutes and they also note that the Tongass timber industry represents less than one percent of today's jobs and earnings in Southeast Alaska; and

WHEREAS, at hearings held across Southeast Alaska in 2000 on the proposed roadless rule, nearly 60 percent of the Southeast Alaskans who spoke at the hearings supported including the Tongass National Forest in the final roadless rule, and this support has only grown to upward of 80 percent to date; and

WHEREAS, the best available science and traditional ecological knowledge support the conclusion that the 'no action alternative' should be the preferred alternative to the roadless rule changes.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) opposes any rulemaking that weakens or eliminates Roadless Rule protections within tribal traditional territories, including the Tongass National Forest; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, such change would substantially and negatively affect the inherent rights of tribes to use the land in traditional and customary ways; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI opposes any action that negatively affects traditional lands and waters without the affected tribes' consent; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in light of proposed changes to the Roadless Rule protections as applied to the Tongass National Forest, the National Congress of American Indians strongly supports a 'no-action alternative' to narrowing the protections provided by the Roadless Rule to all National Forest lands within tribal traditional territories; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2019 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Albuquerque Convention Center, October 20-25, 2019, with a quorum present.



Fawn Sharp, President

ATTEST:



Juana Majel Dixon, Recording Secretary