

February 5, 2024

President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Senator Chuck Schumer  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden, Secretary Haaland, Senator Schumer, and Advisor Zaidi,

We are scientists with backgrounds in forest ecosystems, climate change, and natural resource systems writing on behalf of the globally significant Tongass rainforest in Alaska. If Bill S.1889/H.R. 4748 is passed, 115,200 acres of the Tongass National Forest (TNF) would be privatized. Over 80,000 acres of irreplaceable old-growth forests including over 60,000 acres currently protected by the 2001 Roadless Rule would be opened to logging, mining and other natural resource extraction interests. We urge you to oppose the recently tabled legislation Bill S.1889/H.R. 4748.

The Tongass rainforest provides a unique opportunity for large-scale conservation across one of the world's most important relatively intact temperate rainforests. This diverse region represents ~12% of the larger Pacific Northwest Coastal Forest bioregion that collectively constitutes 34% of the world's temperate rainforests, the most such concentration of temperate rainforests on Earth. The TNF houses 16% of the nation's Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) with 17,000 miles (27,358 km) of salmon streams and diverse wildlife populations, some of which are endangered in the lower 48 states. The TNF also contains approximately 5 million acres (2 million hectares) of "productive old growth," the largest such concentration in the nation<sup>1</sup>. Its unique natural climate solutions benefit includes at least 10% of all the carbon<sup>2</sup> within the entire United States National Forest system, most of which is in old-growth forests and roadless areas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/11/5/717>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/11/5/717>; <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/2023AV000965>

<sup>3</sup> *Temperate and Boreal Rainforests of the World: Ecology and Conservation*, by Dominick DellaSala, ISBN: 9781597266758

More than 14 attempts have been made to overturn the 2001 Roadless Rule with each time scientists, the overwhelming majority of the public, and the courts consistently ruling in favor of protecting this globally unique rainforest.

In 1995, Jimmy Carter said: “Sen. Frank Murkowski and Rep. Don Young have made clear their plans to open up the Alaskan wilderness to development. The new Congress must be reawakened to the importance of protecting the interests of all Americans by protecting public lands in Alaska. For what is at stake is an unparalleled system of federal reserves protecting wildlife, fish and wilderness.”<sup>4</sup>

President Joe Biden recently announced efforts to amend all 128 national forest plans for old forest conservation as part of the nation’s commitments to forestall the climate and biodiversity crisis. Bill S.1889/H.R. 4748 would take us in the opposite direction.

A prudent climatesmart strategy for the climate crisis involves capturing and storing carbon long-term and the Tongass is an exceptional place to do so given the relative stability of its forests as potential climate refugia and the myriad of ecosystem, biodiversity, and cultural benefits it provides to the nation. Please do not let Bill S.1889/H.R. 4748 become law.

Sincerely,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc46.html>

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