



# City and Borough of Sitka

100 Lincoln Street • Sitka, Alaska 99835

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November 29, 2019

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Alaska Roadless Rule

Dear Senator Murkowski,

Attached is Resolution NO. 2019-26A of the City and Borough of Sitka Assembly that was passed on November 26, 2019.

The Resolution supports Alternative 1 to the 2001 Roadless Rule.

We would call your attention to the collaborative work that Sitka Conservation Society (SCS) has championed. As a member of the Federal Advisory Committee nominated by the Secretary of Agriculture, SCS has strived to create collaborative options to achieve multiuse land management options for the Tongass National Forest.

Examples of these options are creating opportunities for a timber industry, investments in salmon fisheries enhancement and continuing to chart a course for investment by the visitor industries.

It will be through such multi-party collaborations that a balance can be struck that serves all parties well with Alaska's federal land management.

Thank you for all that you do for our State,

Hugh R. Bevan  
Interim Municipal Administrator

**CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2019-26A**

**A RESOLUTION BY THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA SUPPORTING THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE IN THE ALASKA ROADLESS RULEMAKING PROCESS**

**WHEREAS**, the City and Borough of Sitka expands across Baranof Island and a portion of West Chichagof Island and contains extensive local use areas on Northern Baranof Island, Hoonah Sound, Kruzof Island, and islands throughout Sitka Sound; and,

**WHEREAS**, the sustainability of the future of Sitka's economy, the livelihoods of our citizens, the visitor industry and the commercial fishing industry are highly dependent on a pristine and productive natural setting throughout Southeast Alaska; and,

**WHEREAS**, salmon populations are facing increased challenges from changing ocean conditions, climate change, ocean acidification, rising water temperatures in streams, and ocean warming events in the Pacific Ocean, and freshwater habitat development in the contiguous United States; and,

**WHEREAS**, the approximate combined economic value of Southeast Alaska's ports, including commercial fishing, tourism, recreation, scientific research, fisheries enhancement and community subsistence totals over \$2 billion annually; and,

**WHEREAS**, Southeast Alaska is the most visited region in Alaska, with two-thirds of all visitors to the State coming to this region and therefore acting as a significant contribution to the local and regional economy; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Roadless Rule, first adopted in 2001, was widely supported then, and now overwhelmingly supported throughout Southeast Alaska, to protect 58 million acres of our nation's most essential and intact roadless areas in the National Forest system; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee opposed the Roadless exemption by supporting the no action alternative 1 without opposition at its November 13, 2019 meeting; and

**WHEREAS**, at a recent public comment session in Sitka with over 100 in attendance and 41 given testimony's, 100% in favor of supporting a no action alternative 1; and

**WHEREAS**, roadless areas on the Tongass are essential to Southeast Alaska's way of life and represent some of the most spectacular and unique roadless areas anywhere in the National Forest System that support hunting, fishing, customary and traditional uses, unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities, and opportunities for businesses; and,

**WHEREAS**, the amount of carbon stored in the intact old growth forests and soils of the Tongass National Forest represent one of the highest carbon stores in the world, and the conservation of intact roadless areas and old growth forests on the Tongass are essential for maintaining local and national climate resilience and slowing down climate change throughout the world; and,

**WHEREAS**, increased logging of old growth forests in existing roadless areas would incur a significant cost to taxpayers, as new reports estimate that the subsidization of logging on the

Tongass has cost taxpayers over \$600 million over the past twenty years, and the State of Alaska's own economic analysis states Tongass timber will be fundamentally uncompetitive on the world market; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City and Borough of Sitka has passed multiple resolutions in support of the the aforementioned Transition and revised Tongass Land Management Plan, including Resolution 2010-18, in Support of the USDA Transition Framework, and Resolution 2013-10, a Resolution of the City and Borough of Sitka Supporting Amendments to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) 2008 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to Facilitate the Development of Adequate and Reliable Sources of Renewable Energy for Sitka and Southeast Alaska; and,


**WHEREAS**, the City and Borough of Sitka believes that the resources and time of the Forest Service is better spent improving and streamlining existing permitting process for projects in inventoried roadless areas without pursuing an exemption;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the City and Borough of Sitka strongly supports lasting protection for all inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest as provided for in the 2001 Roadless Rule alternative 1; and


**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the economic livelihoods of Sitka residents would be irreparably harmed by the effects of any exemption from the Roadless Rule on the Tongass, which would lead to increased climate change, increased threats to fish habitat, and development occurring in pristine natural areas that showcase the tourism potential and natural beauty of the Tongass National Forest; and,

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the City and Borough of Sitka encourages the USFS to invest in programs, workforce development, and employment opportunities for Southeast Alaskan residents to restore the health and productivity of the Tongass National Forest's degraded watersheds and streams, as a means of supporting vital ecosystem services and economic opportunities such as carbon sequestration, small-scale timber production, fish and wildlife populations, natural vistas, visitor amenities, subsistence, hydrological resources, and more.

**PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED** by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska on this 26th day of November 2019.

  
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Gary L. Paxton, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sara Peterson, MMC  
Municipal Clerk

1<sup>st</sup> and final reading as amended 11/26/2019

Sponsors: Knox/Eisenbeisz



**Sitka Conservation Society**  
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*“Protecting the natural  
environment of the Tongass while  
supporting the development of  
sustainable communities in  
Southeast Alaska – since 1967.”*

November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Greetings from Sitka, Alaska. I wanted to share a copy of the Sitka newspaper from Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. There are a bunch of articles on activities that the Sitka Conservation Society is working on and I wanted to make sure it was on your radar and express some of the difficulties and frustrations we have right now.

The main article I'll call your attention to is on a presentation I gave to the Sitka Chamber of Commerce. I outlined all of work seeking to find ways to create rural economic development while benefitting from and conserving the natural environment and ensuring that the ecological conditions that support the industries of our members (fishermen, hunting/fishing guides, subsistence resource users, small business owners, small mill owners) are preserved. Our members gathered at our wild foods potluck that weekend and we filled our Centennial Hall with over 300 people bringing in the bounty of the Tongass's lands and waters (2<sup>nd</sup> article). The third article is of a group of Sitkans who are so angry about the roadless rule and the politics involved that they demonstrated in front of the local district offices “in support of Forest Service staff but against Roadless Rule changes.” These articles follow the article from the night before reporting on the 3 hours of testimony from Sitkans on not wanting the Roadless Rule changed and their fears on what it would mean for their subsistence use of Tongass resources.

There is a lot of tension and anxiety on these issues right now in Southeast Alaska. My frustration and the issue I want to express to you is the difficulty that I am having balancing the work we do collaborating across stakeholder groups (Tongass Advisory Committee, Tongass Transition Collaborative, Roadless Rule Advisory Committee) while also getting support and buy-in from the grassroots stakeholders, business owners, and other SE Alaska civic organizations. We've gone way out on a limb trying to find ways to keep a viable timber industry, create a collaborative environment where entities are willing to work in a “compromise” space, and build relationships where we can work together to create a common-ground future for our region and the State. The Roadless Rule Repeal effort is becoming a huge distraction, waste of time, waste of resources, and massive generator of conflict. It has become an obstacle and, as a community leader with 14 years of experience working on USDA policies, investments, and other rural development initiatives in Southeast Alaska, I can tell you that there are no projects or initiatives that repealing the Roadless rule will make possible that are currently unable to proceed. There is an ample list of projects that are allowed and a suite of projects that have been granted exemptions. The limiting factor for projects is the economics of doing them—not the roadless regulation.

In terms of timber—the actual sticking point on this process, opportunities for old growth were outlined in the State Advisory Committee process on a subset of lands that would have been of very limited conflict. Our recommendations could have solved this once-and-for-all and negated the sky-is-falling rhetoric on the extremes of each side. I worked hard to build the space for that opportunity and I was very eager to put our time and focus on implementing the

projects that actual result in economic opportunities, community viability, better Forest Service project implementation, viable long-term timber opportunities, and conservation of core ecological priority areas in ways that they also generate economic outputs.

Instead, the path that was chosen was full exemption and now the extreme voices have been empowered. The path forward will be dominated by lawsuits and attorneys and National groups will be using the Tongass as a poster child. It will be harder for me to build collaboration and create projects and investments that bring entities together for a stronger communities and region. The Forest Service will have to deal with the distraction and public scrutiny of lawsuits which will take valuable staff resources away from getting projects going on-the-ground. This will take away the energy and financial resources that we'll need to actually make projects happen, overcome the obstacles, change the nuts-and-bolts policies and procedures that are hampering/delaying projects, and fully staff the programs that are doing the work that is in demand and urgently needed right now.

I'm writing because your office plays a critical role in all these issues. I know that it is simpler to look at issues at a very broad scale and reduce them to black-and-white simplicities. The reality here in Southeast Alaska is that it is much greyer, there are more complexities, and that we need support for you and your staff to support our efforts in that more complex space. The whole roadless rule alternative 6 preferred alternative just feels like we've kicked a hornets nest that could have been left there and it would have been fine to just avoid it.

I don't how much space there will be in the next year to work in this space. We'll be trying. After the article and my Chamber of Commerce talk, the feedback I got from all sides was basically, "why are you trying to work with the timber industry, it is a losing proposition. We need to focus on other stuff and we need to make our district's priorities heard." I do have a forest management background and I am a wood-worker. There is space for timber harvest on the Tongass—but it will never be the boom industry or core economic driver that it once was. If it is going to be successful, we will all need to be working together to make the space for it to be viable--- there are management activities and investments that need to be made now to make the industry viable 10 years from now. I would encourage your office to support us here in the region on that work, and move away from the issues that put the Tongass in national headlines.

Sincerely,



Andrew Thoms