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## **Recreation, fish businesses put at risk in potential Roadless Rule changes in Tongass, Chugach National Forests**

*Recreational business owners, anglers react to renewed effort by state to increase industrial development, access to old-growth stands for logging in Alaska national forests*

JUNEAU, AK - Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and State of Alaska announced they would launch a new rulemaking process to partially exempt the Tongass and Chugach National Forests from the nearly two-decade-old Roadless Rule. The Roadless Rule was created to protect wild areas on federal lands that provide important fish and wildlife habitat, drinking water, and recreational and business opportunities, all of which are critical to the economy of Alaska.

“Make no mistake: this could open up some of the most important fish and wildlife habitat in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests to outdated and unsustainable old-growth logging and roadbuilding that comes at taxpayer expense, degrades habitat, and displaces other uses of the forest. It’s essential that fishing and tourism interests, the two largest sources of employment from the Tongass and Chugach National Forests, have a say in how Roadless Areas are managed and aren’t displaced or forced to step aside,” said Austin Williams of Trout Unlimited.

Fishing and tourism account for 26 percent of all employment in Southeast Alaska and contribute roughly \$2 billion to the local economy. These industries rely significantly on Roadless Areas for their abundant fish, wildlife, and beautiful scenery.

The Roadless Rule already allows roads between communities, personal use-tree cutting, off-road vehicle use, utility corridors, hydropower development, and even hard rock mining. Roughly 1.5 million Americans commented in favor of the original rule in 2001. In 2016, relying heavily on the recommendations of a diverse group of regional stakeholders, the Tongass Forest Plan was updated to include a 16-year transition to young growth timber harvest in the region, a sustainable alternative to old growth logging that doesn’t require additional logging or road building in Roadless Areas.

“Modifying the Roadless Rule will upend the just-completed Tongass forest plan and derail the nearly-complete Chugach forest plan, both of which have taken years of collaboration, time, and great expense. The current Tongass Forest Plan, which includes protections for Roadless Areas, was monumental and was perhaps the first time a diverse set of stakeholders successfully came together around a common vision for how to move forward on the Tongass and leave the timber wars behind,” said Williams. “The overwhelming majority of Alaskans that participated in that process voiced a desire for increased protections for important fish and wildlife habitat. Rather than flushing that hard work down the drain, we should look for lasting solutions that protect the remaining roadless areas.”

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*Trout Unlimited is the nation’s oldest and largest coldwater fisheries conservation organization. In Alaska, we work with sportsmen and women to ensure the state’s trout and salmon resources remain healthy far into the future through our local chapters and offices in Anchorage and Juneau. Follow TU’s Tongass efforts on [Facebook](#), and visit us online at [tu.org](http://tu.org). Learn more about our work to conserve key areas of the Tongass National Forest at [www.americansalmonforest.org](http://www.americansalmonforest.org)*