

# Roadless Rule Panel Issues Final Report

By KLAS STOLPE  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Alaska's Roadless Rule Citizen Advisory Committee submitted its report today for the State of Alaska to the U.S. Forest Service on a state-specific Roadless Rule for the Tongass National Forest.

The committee members were appointed by Gov. Bill Walker in late September to advise the state on its recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service on future management of the Tongass, which is now covered by the Roadless Rule as it applies to all national forests in the country.

The committee met in Juneau on October 2-3, Ketchikan October 24-26 and in Sitka November 6-8. The committee was given until Nov. 30 to submit recommendations. The state's position is advisory only — the U.S. Forest Service will make all decisions on the makeup of an Alaska-specific Roadless Rule for the Tongass.

"I think that the biggest challenge facing the committee was the short timeline to get the work done," said Diana Porter, the senior mediator of the Meridian Institute, the facilitator for the committee. "They met three times to develop the recommendations. In the end a few members said that timeline actually helped them because it was so condensed it really pushed them to get

their work done."  
Over the past two months the committee developed four options for its final report.

The option for "no action," was already on the table, as was an option to exempt the entire forest from the provisions of the national Roadless Rule.

The committee member's charge was to come up with three alternatives between those extremes and they produced four.

The four options are labeled A, B, C, and D in a chart on page 14 of the final report. To varying degrees they would allow road, building and associated tree cutting in the existing inventoried roadless areas of the Tongass for projects associated with transportation and utilities, mining, hydroelectric and other renewable energy, cultural uses, and habitat and forest health improvement.

The options also include ones that remove particular locations from the roadless inventory to allow for commercial timber harvest and other economic development activities, while retaining or designating additional areas for conservation of their roadless values.

The closest option (A) to the no-action alternative would only change the Roadless Roadless Areas, basically places that were inventoried under the current rule as roadless but which actually

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ally had roads dating from the time before the Roadless Rule was applied to the Tongass.

This option said the second growth on these previously logged lands could potentially sustain a small forest industry.

The committee used Forest Service maps on which the preferred use of specific areas is indicated by a system of Land Use Designations (LUDs). All of the committee options stated that existing Roadless Rule provisions should continue to apply to previously designated non-development LUDs, such as LUD II areas that contain important streams.

Portner noted that the public may not have fully understood the committee's task was to find options for the Tongass between keeping the Roadless Rule intact or removing it altogether.

"In Juneau and Sitka it was probably more of a focus in keeping the Roadless Rule the way that it is right now, so keeping the protections in place," Porter said. "And when we were in Ketchikan we heard a bit more of a mixed response, sort of half-and-half saying it should be kept the way it is with the protections in place or it should be completely removed and have a full exemption. It was a little difficult to get the public comment that could really inform the committee's process because the committee was charged with coming up with recommendations that fit in the middle between the 'no action' which would be in keeping the Roadless Rule as is, or the 'full exemption' which would completely remove it. The committee was actually charged with finding something in between that. So coming up with options that represented a middle ground between those two."

The committee's recommendations went to Gov. Walker and State Forester Chris Maisch who passed them on to the State cooperating agency team working with the Forest Service on their process.

The State of Alaska is one of several cooperating agencies working with the U.S. Forest Service as it prepares

a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the state-specific rule.

The DEIS is expected to be released some time next summer. The committee members will reconvene at that time to review how the draft aligns with the recommendations.

If requested they can provide additional input to the state.

The Forest Service will also be offering another public comment period to hear additional thoughts on the DEIS at that time.

"The Forest Service now is working to develop alternatives to analysis for what the rule could entail," Porter said. "One of those alternatives will be the 'no action,' one will be the 'full exemption,' and then there will be other alternatives in the middle. The hope of the committee is that, by way of the state cooperating agency, that some of their options will make it through to that analysis."

The committee's report is posted at [www.merid.org/AKroadless](http://www.merid.org/AKroadless).

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue is expected to sign off on the completed ruling in the spring 2020.

The Alaska Roadless Rule citizen advisory committee appointed by Gov. Walker includes:

- Trey Acteson, Southeast Alaska Power Agency
- Bert Burkhardt, Alaska Forest Association
- Nicole Grewe, Ex Officio Member, U.S. Forest Service, Region 10
- Brian Holst, Juneau Economic Development Council
- Andy Hughes, Regional Planning Chief, Southeast Region Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (retired)
- Michael Kampanich, The Nature Conservancy
- Jaeleen Kookesh, Sealaska Corporation
- Chris Maisch, Alaska Division of Forestry
- Eric Nichols, Alecan Forest Products

Mark Vinsel, United Fishermen of Alaska  
Ralph Wolfe, 5th Vice President, Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.

- Andrew Thoms, Sitka Conservation Society
- Jan Trigg, Coeur Alaska Kensington Mine
- Robert Venables, Southeast Conference