

Background: The Tongass Forest of Southeast Alaska is the largest national forest in the United States and the Earth's largest remaining temperate rainforest. A richly bio-diverse area, the many islands of the Alexander Archipelago and Coast Mountains rising from the Alaskan coast are home to bears, wolves, and Sitka black-tailed deer, along with a plethora of bald eagles, ravens and migratory birds.

An abundance of orca and humpback whales, sea lions, seals, sea otters, salmon and porpoises thrive in coastal waters and the fjords cut by glaciers, and the natural wildness of the area drives a healthy local-based economy for Tongass communities and visitors.

Beginning in the 1950's, aggressive, controversial commercial logging clear-cut large areas of the Tongass, negatively impacting the forest and the local Indigenous Peoples who are tightly intertwined with the dynamic ecosystem. Logging in the Tongass destroys sacred sites of the Indigenous Peoples of the region, damages areas of traditional and customary use, and harms watersheds and rivers as well as the global climate.

Even with a destructive history of industrial logging, the Tongass still contains the largest remaining tracts of temperate old-growth rainforest in the world. The Roadless Rule put in place in the early 2000s protects much of the ecosystem, helping make it the U.S.'s single most important national forest for carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation. As parts of Alaska are warming at roughly twice the rate of the rest of the planet, maintaining an intact Tongass ecosystem is critical to providing climate change solutions for Alaska and international climate efforts.

With the current administration, pressures to lift restrictions and allow exploitation of the commercial value of remaining old growth lumber by timber corporations and commercial interests have increased substantially. In 2018, just as the Tongass began to heal, Alaska's congress members petitioned for the U.S. Forest Service to consider exempting the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule. With recent Federal actions attempting to undermine the Roadless Rule, the treasured Tongass forest faces one of its greatest and most immediate threats to date.

The WECAN Indigenous Women's Tongass Delegation and allies understand the gravity of the issue and are united in calling for support of the current Roadless Rule and its protections for the Tongass.