

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Southeast Alaska Tribes laud Biden administration plans to restore protections for Tongass National Forest

Kake, AK — The Organized Village of Kake (OVK) and Southeast Alaska Tribes fighting to protect the Tongass National Forest are praising the Biden Administration for today's announcement of a process to restore protections for the forest. Today's announcement makes good on the Biden Administration's June notice that it would "repeal or replace" the rule completed under the Trump administration that opened 9.2 million acres of the Tongass National Forest to road construction and logging. The past administration ignored Tribes' input and fully exempted the Tongass from the roadless rule. The Biden Administration's action today will restore the protections essential to Tribes' way of life and the fish and wildlife that depend on a healthy Tongass ecosystem.

Organized Village of Kake President Joel Jackson said, "Finally after 2 years of hurry-up-and-get-this-done - with lots of talking, but very little consultation of Tribes by Trump Administration officials in Washington DC, we have an administration that is willing to sit down and do some meaningful consultation. It's a great thing for our people and the planet that the Biden administration is following the science on the importance of the Tongass national forest to the world. The Tongass is not only our traditional homeland, but it is the last largest temperate rain forest in the world. It's a carbon sink absorbs up to 40 percent of the total carbon in the air."

In his first few months in office, President Biden recommitted the United States to the Paris international climate agreement and today's restoration of full protections to "America's Amazon," the Tongass National Forest, will help ensure U.S. adherence to Article 5 of the Paris Agreement which calls on countries to protect nature-based solutions that enhance carbon sinks and reservoirs. By taking action to protect the Tongass and other carbon-dense mature forests across Southeast Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, the Biden administration can build lasting safeguards for reaching critical climate goals.

Additionally, both the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) passed resolutions earlier this year supporting SE Alaska Tribes' ongoing efforts to establish lasting protection for the Tongass National Forest. NCAI is the only national association of all federally recognized and state-recognized Indian Tribes working to secure and preserve American Indian and Alaska Native sovereign rights. ATNI represents over 50 Northwest tribal governments and advocates for the interests of its member Tribes. The resolutions call for three concrete actions: 1. Support of the Roadless Rule Area Conservation Act currently under consideration in Congress; 2. Restoration of lasting protections for the inventoried roadless areas within the National Tongass Forest as provided in the 2001 Roadless Rule; and, 3. Request for the Secretary of Agriculture to respond to Southeast Tribes' Administrative Procedures Act Petition asking for a separate Traditional Homelands Conservation Rule.

Joel Jackson, President, Organized Village of Kake said, "To Southeast Alaska native communities, retaining the Tongass roadless areas and old growth timber is vital to keeping our salmon streams cool and clear so the salmon will return year after year. With this announcement we know the deer, the moose, the bear as well as all the other wildlife will be protected – as will our native peoples' way of life that is intertwined with our lands and waters that our ancestors stewarded for over 10,000 years."

Nearly a quarter of a million people from throughout the country submitted comments objecting to the Trump administration's plan before it was finalized. And among Alaskans who hunt and fish, 61 percent support maintaining roadless rule protections in the Tongass.

"Support for reinstating Roadless protections on the Tongass has only grown. In the last two years we have testified to Congressional leaders and the Forest Service, but it was in our recent consultation with the USDA and US Forest Service where we were finally listened to. Gunalchéesh to the Biden administration for restoring protections that will save our traditional homelands", said President Jackson.

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Organized Village of Kake (OVK)

Organized Village of Kake is a federally recognized tribal government whose core purpose is to strengthen tribal community and culture. To advance its purpose, OVK promotes the welfare of tribal citizens and descendants through the development and operation of social, economic, and cultural enterprises, and preserves and maintains Native cultural traditions and subsistence lifestyle.