May 9, 2022

Dear Representative Joe Neguse,

As matriarchs of the Tongass forest, we are writing to you in support of the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2021 (RACA), presented and sponsored by Representative Gallego [D-AZ-7], which will protect almost 60 million acres of treasured national forestlands and intact watersheds, including over 16 million acres in the Tongass forest, our traditional homelands.

We are speaking out in support of RACA to protect the largest national forest in the country, the Tongass Rainforest, which exists within the traditional homelands of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian Peoples in Alaska. Our people have been here for over 10,000 years, and we are here to protect and preserve the land so we can be here for 10,000 years more.

The Tongass has been called 'America’s climate forest' due to its unsurpassed ability to sequester carbon and mitigate climate impacts. It is responsible for holding more than 40% of all carbon stored by U.S. national forests. As one of the world’s largest remaining intact temperate rainforests, the Tongass is home to over 400 species of land and marine wildlife, and provides economic opportunity to thousands of residents.

As Indigenous Women of the Tongass, we represent the air, land, and sea through our deep cultural connections to our land and waters, and we have seen how decades of rampant industrial scale logging has scarred our precious ecosystems in the Tongass, disrupting the traditional lifeways, medicine, and food systems of our communities. The Roadless Rule has been critical in the Tongass, staving off renewed efforts for old-growth logging, deforestation and mining. To allow for any further environmental degradation in our territories would be an act of cultural genocide.

In 2021, the Biden Administration announced its plans to restore full Roadless Rule protections, and end large-scale old growth timber sales across the entire 16 million acres of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. We commend this decision, yet we know our forests will never truly be safe until the Roadless Rule is codified into law.

RACA is vital to permanently protecting our homelands, national forests, uplifting Indigenous sovereignty, and ensuring government action on the climate crisis.

Sincerely,

Wanda Kashudoha Loescher Culp (Tlingit), WECAN Tongass Coordinator
Mamie Williams (Tlingit) WECAN Tongass Representative
Yolanda Fulmer (Tlingit), WECAN Tongass Representative
Rebekah Contreras (Yupik), WECAN Tongass Representative
Kari Ames (Tlingit) WECAN Tongass Representative

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4 https://www.wecaninternational.org/PressReleases/Indigenous-Women-Uplift-Biden-Administration%E2%80%99s-Decision-to-
Protect-the-Tongass-National-Forest