

Tongass National Forest narrowly avoids threat from spending bill

Government spending bill does not include riders removing protections to old-growth

Washington, DC (March 22, 2018) – Congress is poised to pass into a law a \$1.3 trillion omnibus spending bill for government funding. Conservation groups had initially feared the final bill text would include two legislative riders related to the Tongass National Forest and championed by Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski. The bill text, released on Wednesday, did not include the two riders. One rider would have repealed an Obama-era amendment to the Tongass Land Management Plan. The other rider would have exempted the Tongass from the Roadless Rule. Together, these two riders would have returned the Tongass to a 2008 management plan, walked back protections in key watersheds and roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest, and reversed a long-planned transition away from the practice of old-growth clearcutting.

“Congress did the right thing by excluding these riders from the spending bill. Tongass old-growth forests are vital for birds, deer, salmon, and people. More than half of the large-tree old-growth has already been cut down on the Tongass and replaced with second-growth forest that is an ecologically poor substitute,” said **Audubon Alaska’s Executive Director Nils Warnock**. “It is encouraging to see the current Tongass Plan and the Roadless Rule remain intact as tangible steps toward ending the unsustainable practice of old-growth clearcutting on the Tongass.”

“Protecting Tongass old growth makes economic, as well as ecological, sense,” continued Warnock. “Fishing, tourism, and wildlife all depend on big trees and in turn provide a wealth of economic benefits to the region, whereas clearcutting old-growth costs taxpayers tens of millions of dollars and robs the future generation of its sustainable forest. Policy leaders should advance, not delay, the transition away from old-growth clearcutting on the Tongass.”

The spending bill passed the House on Thursday and now advances to the Senate. The Senate must pass the bill prior to a Friday deadline, when federal spending is due to run out, or risk another government shutdown.

About Audubon

Since 1977, Audubon Alaska's mission is to conserve the spectacular natural ecosystems of the state, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Audubon Alaska uses science to identify conservation priorities and support conservation actions and policies, with an emphasis on public lands and waters. Audubon Alaska is a state office of the National Audubon Society. Learn more at www.AudubonAlaska.org.

The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation. Audubon's state programs, nature centers, chapters and partners have an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire and unite diverse communities in conservation action. Since 1905, Audubon's vision has been a world in which people and wildlife thrive. Audubon is a nonprofit

conservation organization. Learn more how to help at www.Audubon.org and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @audubonsociety.

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