

National Audubon Society · Sierra Club · Earthjustice · Pew Environment Group  
The Wilderness Society · Defenders of Wildlife · Alaska Wilderness League  
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council · Sitka Conservation Society  
Environment America · League of Conservation Voters · Clean Water Action  
Union of Concerned Scientists · Friends of the Earth · Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

June 14, 2012

Dear Representative:

Next week, the House of Representatives will be voting on an anti-public lands package (H.R. 2578), which includes a bill that threatens to destroy some of America's last stands of ancient old-growth forest.

H.R. 1408, the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Job Protection Act, introduced by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) and now incorporated in H.R. 2578, would grant unprecedented special rights to the Sealaska Corporation, a multi-million dollar Alaska Native Corporation (ANC), to log a significant portion of the last remaining large tree old-growth stands in the Tongass National Forest. Located in southeastern Alaska and often called the "crown jewel" of our national forest system, the Tongass includes a substantial part of the world's rare coastal temperate rainforests. Over 80 percent of the Pacific Coast's wild salmon are born in its 5,500 streams and rivers.

On behalf of the millions of members and supporters of the above signed organizations in Southeast Alaska and all across the country, **we strongly urge you to vote against H.R. 2578.**

HR 1408 would give Sealaska Corporation ownership of public lands throughout the Tongass, including many of the very best sites at the heads of bays or mouths of salmon streams. These lands and waters are currently open to the American public for fishing, hunting, and recreation and are used for small tourism businesses and sport and commercial fishing. The Tongass National Forest fish habitat supports a nearly \$1 billion fishing industry alone.

According to a report by Audubon Alaska, the Tongass has lost half or more of its very large old-growth stands during the past century. The report found that these trees, some of which can be 500 years old and up to 10 feet in diameter, now make up less than 2 percent of the forest. Like California's giant redwoods, these ancient forests are magnificent in their own right and provide irreplaceable habitat for fish and wildlife. These last remaining big tree stands account for almost one-quarter of the old-growth that Sealaska Corporation would be allowed to log and export under H.R. 1408.

The Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service has made clear that it has serious concerns regarding the Sealaska Corporation proposal. The bill would harm the Department of Agriculture's Transition Plan for the Tongass by not only giving Sealaska Corporation a significant portion of the last remaining very large old-growth stands but also some of the best parcels of second-growth forest. The latter is critical to the agency's plan to transition the economy of Southeast Alaska from reliance on old-growth logging to one of sustainable economic development through restoration, renewable energy production, fishing and tourism. In addition, the administration has noted that approximately \$50 million in taxpayer-funded roads and infrastructure has been invested in the lands that Sealaska Corporation would obtain under the bill. This would be a great waste of taxpayer dollars and further impair the U.S. Forest Service's ability to generate revenues from sustainable logging.

The Sealaska Corporation is the largest of the thirteen regional Alaska Native Corporations created under the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Not to be confused with a traditional tribal entity – which has a mission that is very different from that of a private, profit making ANCSA corporation – Sealaska Corporation is a managed holding company with corporate subsidiaries and offices throughout the United States, Mexico, Canada and Europe. Investing in industries ranging from gaming to plastics, and generating nearly \$250 million in annual revenues, according to the Sealaska website, its principal business activities include “forest products and land management as well as providing diversity supply for innovative manufacturing ventures and as an investor in the financial markets.”

In the Lower 48 states, approximately 96 percent of the old-growth forest has been cut down. The Tongass now represents not only the greatest remaining reserve of huge trees in the United States, but also nearly one-third of the old-growth temperate rainforest left in the world. Giving one company the unique right to select and control some of the very best lands in the Tongass would eliminate public access to vital areas of the forest for sport and commercial fishing, hunting, recreation, and small tourism businesses while clearcutting in the last remaining old-growth stands will result in the loss of a treasured resource that belongs to all Americans.

**Please protect this crown jewel of our national forest system by opposing H.R. 2578.**

Sincerely,

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