



Southeast Alaska Conservation Council

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March 12, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The Southeast Alaska Conservation Council is a grassroots organization representing more than 2,500 supporters in Southeast Alaska, spanning more than 30 communities and nearly 73,000 residents of which 22% are Alaska Native. On behalf of our membership, we are writing to request that you suspend the Alaska Roadless Rulemaking process until the USDA's Office of Inspector General completes its inquiry into how the funds were spent.

In June 2018, in response to the State of Alaska's petition dated January 2018 requesting an exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule, you directed the Chief of the Forest Service to initiate a state-specific rulemaking for roadless area management for the Tongass National Forest.¹ In March 2019, the State of Alaska signed a cooperative agreement with the Alaska Forest Association (AFA), a timber industry trade organization to conduct work related to the proposed Alaska Roadless Rulemaking.² The agreement authorized funding up to \$250,000 through June 30, 2021. This funding was part of a \$2 million State Fire Assistance Program grant from the U.S. Forest Service designated to fund firefighting work, but redirected to support the state's participation as a cooperating agency in the Alaska Roadless Rulemaking process. In August 2018, the State of Alaska had coordinated with the USDA to modify this grant to allow the State to use the funds to work on the Alaska Roadless Rulemaking process as a cooperating agency.³ It's important to note that the six Southeast Alaska Native Tribal governments designated as cooperating agencies on the rulemaking process received zero dollars in federal or state funds.

As you are aware, following a request dated Nov. 18, 2019, from Sen. Debbie Stabenow and Rep. Raúl Grijalva, the USDA's Inspector General (OIG) Phyllis K. Fong is now investigating the potential misuse of this grant money and whether it was appropriate to fund the AFA to conduct

¹ See: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/roadless/alaskaroadlessrule/?cid=fseprd672388>

² Cooperative Agreement between the Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry and the Alaska Forest Association. March 2019. available at: <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/ktoo/2019/09/DNR-AFA-Agreement-Tongass-roadless-rule-Final-All-Signatures.pdf>

³ See: <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/ktoo/2019/09/18DG11100106810Mod2Exec-2.pdf>

work related to the proposed rulemaking.⁴ Given the possibility that these funds were misused to finance an industry trade organization which stands to benefit financially from the preferred Alternative 6 identified in the October 2019 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, **we request that you suspend the proposed Alaska Roadless Rulemaking until the OIG investigation is complete.**

We look forward to your response. We are hopeful that Sen. Lisa Murkowski and the rest of Alaska's Congressional delegation recognize the importance of protecting the interests of Alaska taxpayers and providing equity across all cooperating agencies in the rulemaking process, by ensuring the OIG's investigation moves forward. In addition, we welcome the full cooperation of the Alaska Governor's Office, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the AFA in the OIG's investigation.

Sincerely,



Meredith Trainor
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Dan Sullivan
The Honorable Representative Don Young
The Honorable Governor Mike Dunleavy, State of Alaska
Ronald Leighton, President, Organized Village of Kasaan
Joel Jackson, President, Organized Village of Kake
Jeanette Kookesh, President, Angoon Community Association
Frank Wright, Jr., Hoonah Indian Association
Sid Edenshaw, President, Hydaburg Cooperative Association
Richard Peterson, President, Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Corri Feige, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Tessa Axelson, Executive Director, Alaska Forest Association
Dave Schmid, Regional Forester, United States Forest Service Alaska Region
Vicki Christiansen, Forest Service Chief, United States Department of Agriculture

⁴ See: https://www.alaskajournal.com/sites/alaskajournal.com/files/19.11.18_stabenow_grijalva_letter_on_tongass_0.pdf