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Contacts:

Chris Wood, president and CEO, Trout Unlimited, chris.wood@tu.org

Austin Williams, Alaska legal and policy director, Trout Unlimited, (907) 227-1590 or awilliams@tu.org

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U.S. Forest Service charts a new direction for the Tongass National Forest

By ending industrial old-growth logging and investing in restoration, USFS places new focus on forest health, recreation, and resiliency

JUNEAU, AK — The U.S. Forest Service announced today a new “Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy” for the Tongass National Forest. Details of the strategy include fully reinstating the 2001 roadless rule; ending large-scale old-growth logging on the Tongass and prioritizing restoration, recreation, and resiliency; and making significant new investments in projects that support sustainable economic growth. Trout Unlimited applauds the Forest Service’s decision to invest in conserving the natural resources of the Tongass.

“The real value of the Tongass is in its abundant fish and wildlife, its cultural resources, and in its beautiful scenery and wild landscapes,” said Austin Williams, Trout Unlimited’s Alaska director of law and policy. “This announcement will help ensure these values remain long into the future, that we are investing where we see the greatest return, and that management of the Tongass supports the region’s economic mainstays of fishing and tourism.”

Decades of industrial-scale logging have claimed many of the best and most productive trees on the Tongass. While just 12 percent of the productive old-growth forest on the Tongass has been cut, unsustainable clear-cut logging has removed [66.5 percent](#) of the highest-volume contiguous old-growth forest. On Prince of Wales Island, where logging has been most intense, [93.8 percent](#) of such forest is gone. Forest-wide, the spiderweb of logging roads has left of legacy of more than [1,100 culverts](#) that fail to meet state or federal standards for fish migration and impede access to nearly 250 miles of salmon and trout stream. Yet, an October 2020, decision exempted the Tongass from the roadless rule, which

opened the door to expanded industrial old-growth logging and construction of new logging roads on more than 9 million acres of the forest.

Reinstating the roadless rule and refocusing agency resources on restoration and recreation instead of large-scale, old-growth logging will support Southeast Alaska's diversified economy and help conserve scarce forest resources. A healthy forest is integral to the local economy with fishing and tourism making up [1 in 4](#) of the region's jobs and contributing \$2 billion annually to the local economy. These jobs are dependent upon the flourishing fish and wildlife and scenic beauty that are quintessential to the Tongass.

"The Tongass is one of the last, best places for wild salmon left in North America and a globally significant resource for slowing the impacts of climate change," said Chris Wood, President and CEO of Trout Unlimited. "Old-growth timber sales have long been notorious for losing money; reinstating the roadless rule and prioritizing restoration is an investment in the forest's most valuable and lasting resources.

More than 96% of all public comments opposed the "Tongass Exemption" and supported keeping roadless area protections. A statewide [2019 poll](#) commissioned by Trout Unlimited found the majority of likely voters in Alaska opposed efforts to repeal the Roadless Rule and strongly supported efforts to protect salmon, wildlife, and high-value salmon streams in the Tongass.

"For far too long, our fish and wildlife were taken for granted on the Tongass," said Williams. "It's a breath of fresh air to see investments made to ensure they are around for future generations."

The economic factors and public support make it clear – a healthy forest is what's best for the wildlife, people and economy of Southeast Alaska.

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Trout Unlimited, the nation's oldest and largest coldwater fisheries conservation organization, is dedicated to caring for and recovering America's rivers and streams, so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Across the country, TU brings to bear local, regional, and national grassroots organizing, durable partnerships, science-backed policy muscle, and legal firepower on behalf of trout and salmon fisheries, healthy waters and vibrant communities. In Alaska, we work with sportsmen and women to ensure the state's trout and salmon resources remain healthy far into the future through our local chapters and offices in Anchorage and Juneau. Learn more about our work to conserve key areas of the Tongass National Forest at www.americansalmonforest.org