

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 21, 2018

The Honorable James Costa  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Costa:

As you and your fellow conferees meet to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions of H.R. 2, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, we strongly urge you to retain Section 8337 of the House-passed legislation. This provision, which would restore the state of Alaska's exemption from the 2001 Roadless Conservation Area Rule, is particularly critical to the health of our rural communities located within the Tongass National Forest.

Alaska accounts for nearly 12 percent of all Forest Service lands in the nation and is home to the two largest National Forests in the system: the Tongass in southeast at 16.7 million acres (an area roughly the size of West Virginia) and the Chugach in southcentral at 5.4 million acres (an area roughly the size of New Hampshire). There are 9.5 million acres of inventoried roadless in the Tongass and 5.4 million acres in the Chugach. Taken together with designated wilderness, nearly 93 percent of the Tongass and 99 percent of the Chugach is off-limits to development. Given that just one percent of the land in southeast Alaska is in private ownership, the Forest Service truly holds the key to prosperity for the 32 towns and villages in that region.

Regrettably, the application of the Roadless Rule to Alaska's national forests has been disastrous for the forest products industry. It has decimated the timber base identified as suitable for harvest, removing over 2.5 million acres of the Tongass' best commercial timber. This leaves approximately 270,000 acres – just 1.6 percent of the Tongass – open to harvest, which has caused production levels to plummet, mills to shut down, and good jobs to be lost.

The timber industry is just one of many that the Roadless Rule is harming. The Tongass is rich in energy and mineral resources, including significant hydropower potential and an unparalleled deposit of rare earth elements, a group of minerals that was recently classified as critical by the federal government. The Roadless Rule is sharply impeding both renewable energy and responsible mining, and even tourism and fisheries are negatively impacted by the significant access restrictions it imposes.

The Roadless Rule has never made sense in Alaska. The appropriate balance between protection and development was determined by Congress long ago through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

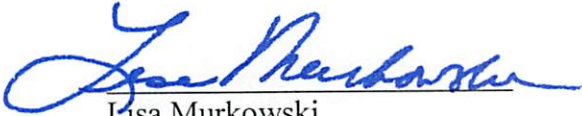
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Accordingly, we respectfully urge you to retain Section 8337 of the House-passed bill in conference, and appreciate your continued work on behalf of all who are affected by the decisions and regulations of the U.S. Forest Service.

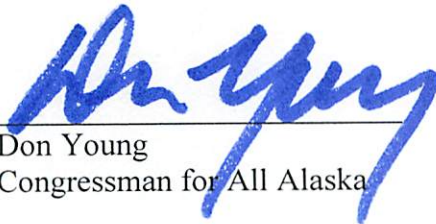
Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator



Don Young  
Congressman for All Alaska