111 Scientists Call on Biden Administration to Make Tongass Temperate Rainforest first entry into a nationwide carbon reserve system for all the nation's older forests

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As scientists with backgrounds in natural resources, climate change, forest carbon, biodiversity natural resource economics, and medicine we write to express our strong support for the Biden Administration's development of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the upcoming United Nations COP26. We request that the NDCs comply with Article 5 of the Paris Agreement by protecting the nation's carbon dense mature forest ecosystems ("*carbon reservoirs*") in a *strategic natural carbon reserve on federal lands*. To begin this process, we ask specifically that all old-growth forests and roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska be a central part of the administration's NDC commitments and the first entry into the strategic carbon reserve system for protecting remaining older forests on federal lands nationwide¹.

The 16.8 million-acre Tongass National Forest is the crown jewel of the national forest system and is the recognized national champion in storing the equivalent of some 8% of all US forest carbon². The Tongass is one of the world's last remaining relatively intact temperate rainforests that supports a robust tourism and fishing economy, including the provision of abundant salmon, deer, and cultural resources for Indigenous Peoples³. Because of its northern coastal distribution, the Tongass is likely to function as a "*climate sanctuary*⁴," in contrast to interior Alaska that is experiencing one of the fastest rates of climate change on the planet⁵. Protecting climate sanctuaries like the Tongass is a crucial step toward maintaining the nations' most important ecosystem services and biodiversity increasingly at-risk.

The Tongass is also the only national forest where industrial logging of old-growth forests continues apace despite overwhelming public and tribal opposition. Tongass logging and road building costs the American taxpayer some \$600 million over two decades⁶. Despite these costs, the Trump Administration recently rescinded 9.3 million acres of roadless area protections that would allow road building and logging of some 186,000 acres of the largest, oldest trees. Such targeted logging would, according to one estimate, result in the equivalent emissions of ~10 million vehicles on Alaska's roadways⁷, a clear defiance of the warnings to humanity from thousands of scientists⁸ regarding escalating climate and biodiversity calamities. In sum, we have

¹ https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/a-strategic-natural-carbon-reserve-to-fight-climate-change/

²https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225169208_Effects_of_Management_on_Carbon_Sequestration_in_Forest_Biomass_in_Southeast_Al aska

³ DellaSala, D.A. 2011. https://islandpress.org/books/temperate-and-boreal-rainforests-world

⁴ DellaSala, D.A., et al. 2015. https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/journals/pnw_2015_dellasala001.pdf

⁵ https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/lands/ecosystems/pdfs/sp10_14.pdf

⁶ https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.taxpayer.net%2Fenergy-natural-resources%2Fnew-report-taxpayers-losing-hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars-on-tongass-timber-sales-over-last-two-

decades% 2F&data=04%7C01%7C0ped% 40 seattletimes.com%7Cce2fce3e14fe4a4ca76708d895697bdb%7Cfc2b8476b7f0473d82fbe0a89fd99855%7C0%7C0%7C637423627615324626%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C2000&sdata=YXnxLis3y%2F9tuHbEE5SmImv2bewfFSoSywXPvJj7f6M%3D&reserved=0

⁷ https://forestlegacies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/tongass_carbon_2019_12_16.pdf

⁸ https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-climate-emergency-2020-in-review/

precious little time before ecosystems and the climate are pushed beyond the point of no return that according to a recent United Nations report⁹ will impact all citizens on the planet, including the grim prospect of contributing to more global pandemics as wild areas are increasingly developed and more zoonotic diseases released¹⁰.

We urge that you demonstrate global leadership on the importance of including the nation's remaining carbon dense, natural, and intact areas in a system-wide reserve network that would begin with the Tongass in the NDCs. Doing so, would also demonstrate progress towards the administration's commitment to protect 30 percent of all lands and waters by 2030.

Sincerely (*affiliations for identification purposes only),

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⁹ https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature

¹⁰ https://newrepublic.com/article/157361/public-health-depends-healthy-planet

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