



121 W. FIREWEED LANE, SUITE 120 | ANCHORAGE, AK 99503 | 907.563.9229 | ALASKAMINERS.ORG

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Contact: Deantha Skibinski

(907) 317-6323

[deantha@alaskaminers.org](mailto:deantha@alaskaminers.org)

### **Alaska Miners Association Applauds Total Tongass Forest Exemption from Roadless Rule**

Juneau, AK - The Alaska Miners Association today applauded the Record of Decision released today by the United States Forest Service that totally exempts the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule.

In its 2003 rulemaking, the U.S. Department of Agriculture identified total exemption of the Tongass as the best alternative as it weighed the social and economic hardships to Southeast Alaska against potential long-term ecological benefits and determined the Tongass Forest plan adequately provides for the environmental sustainability of the Tongass. This *policy* determination has not been changed by the Department of Agriculture or overturned by a Court.

“Total Exemption remains the best option today as it did in 2003,” said Deantha Skibinski, AMA Executive Director. “Every facet of Southeast Alaska’s economy is important and the potential adverse impacts from application of the roadless rule are not warranted, given the abundance of roadless areas and protections already afforded in the Tongass Forest Plan.”

Exempting the Tongass from the Roadless Rule will guarantee road access to locatable minerals for operators that can meet the rigorous environmental standards of 36 C.F.R. Part 228 and the associated National Environmental Policy Act review. It would also authorize the cutting of trees needed to support mineral exploration and development.

AMA Juneau Branch Chairman Jim Clark advises, “While reasonable access to mining claims under the General Mining Law is authorized by the 2001 Roadless Rule, the Preamble to the Rule is careful to point out that it does not mean road access. The Forest Service has reserved the right to prevent or limit road access in Roadless Areas. So, while “reasonable access” to locatable minerals is also technically authorized in Wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) under 36 C.F.R. Part 228, there are very few mines in Wilderness or Roadless Areas. Special Use Permits permitting road access in or near Wilderness Areas and IRAs are exceedingly difficult to obtain.”

“Reasonable access” has been the subject of debate as while technically permitted, the regulations that authorize timber management for certain types of activities do not specify mining as an authorized activity and prescribe requirements that make cutting trees only a rare option and only to small diameter trees.

These limiting factors do not provide for any type of economic development, particularly mining.

Mining permitting requires a minimized footprint, stringent ongoing compliance, and all land disturbance must be reclaimed when mining is complete. The reclamation is guaranteed by rigorous financial assurance requirements imposed to the developer.

Mining provides nearly 10,000 high paying jobs across Alaska, including nearly 1,000 in Southeast Alaska. RainCoast Data determined that mining provided a payroll of \$95 million in Southeast communities in 2019.

Total exemption of the Roadless Rule in the Tongass will remove a barrier to mining access without removing any environmental protections. AMA thanks the Trump Administration and USDA for its sensible approach to economic growth with environmental balance.

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