Blumenauer Tongass Roads Approps Amendment TPs

Topline:

* The last thing the Forest Service needs to do is to start building controversial and expensive new roads into remote roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest or anywhere else.
* Roadless areas in the Tongass protect some of America’s best fish and wildlife habitat, and also helped save untold millions of taxpayer dollars that otherwise would have been spent subsidizing money-losing, below-cost timber sales.
* There are currently more than 4,000 miles of road on the Tongass, many of which are used solely by the timber industry for logging purposes.  Taxpayers are building roads they cannot use in order to shield timber companies from the true cost of doing business.  New Tongass roads will only saddle taxpayers with additional construction and maintenance costs the Forest Service has already proven itself incapable of meeting.
* For decades, the Tongass timber industry has quietly benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies, much of it covering costs associated with building logging roads that serve no other public benefit.
* In an outdated and archaic system, the Forest Service spends millions of dollars every year to plan, prepare, and administer timber sales on the Tongass, spends millions of taxpayer dollars constructing roads to access the timber, then takes a massive loss when it “sells” the timber. In the end, it costs taxpayers drastically MORE to “sell” the timber than we get in return. The feds actually [end up underwater](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.taxpayer.net_article_money-2Dlosing-2Dtimber-2Dsales-2Dtongass-2Dnational-2Dforest_&d=DwMGaQ&c=L93KkjKsAC98uTvC4KvQDdTDRzAeWDDRmG6S3YXllH0&r=9IHkSi7YOElmoc5A4oyjIjXLEPsn0b1SWvqh7tRivSQ&m=j6UGGFMqv6xEmpR6WM-D8w0LYuFjjj97UJ0c-9WxT6E&s=MBEZOJUGuSQ61KVUush1S0e8WaBUKZrzZMrnrA2Bjs0&e=) on these timber sales.
* The warped economics of federal subsidies for the timber industry are magnified in the Tongass. On average, and if all roadbuilding and timber sale costs on the Tongass are taken into account, the Tongass timber sale program costs taxpayers $25.4 million each year while yielding just $1.69 million in return, for an average loss of $23.7 million EACH YEAR over the last 20 years—largely due to the exorbitant costs of building and maintaining new logging roads.
* The Tongass National Forest, in particular, represents everything that is wrong when the government interferes with the market, in this case by forcing taxpayers to bear the costs of constructing logging roads and allowing an industry that accounts for barely 100 jobs to fleece the public.
* By the most generous estimates the Tongass timber industry employed 705 individuals in 2006, down to 278 jobs in 2016. When compared with federal expenditures in the Tongass in those years, each job cost US taxpayers $40,000 and $67,000 in 2006 and 2016 respectively. A massive bailout of the industry by federal taxpayers.
* Although elimination of funds for roadbuilding will not solve our nation’s enormous deficit, getting rid of special-interest subsidies like this is a good first step in the effort to restore fiscal sanity to Washington.
* Prohibiting roads for the purpose of harvesting timber does not halt most activity in roadless areas. It still allows everything from mines to roads connecting communities to hydro facilities and pipelines.
* Large, undisturbed forest areas are what make the Tongass unique and help protect the true economic driver of the region- tourism and fishing. If the Forest Service builds more roads and undermines the roadless rule the economy will crumble. Building more roads will impact:
* Cultural resources. The Forest Service roadless area inventory shows that roadless areas harbor many historic and prehistoric sites, kept undisturbed because of the lack of road access.
* Local recreation. Favorite recreation spots for local communities often are located along the edges of, and protected by, roadless areas. More remote roadless recreation sites are accessible by boat, foot, and plane. Other roadless areas currently receive little human use but are Forest Service listed as having high recreation potential.
* Customary and traditional uses, including subsistence hunting and gathering. State ADF&G data show that roads are a major threat to sustainable subsistence use of Southeast forest resources.
* Tourism. Tour and guide businesses bring people to Southeast to see pristine landscapes, not clearcuts and logging roads. They employ many more SE Alaska residents than does logging.
* Fisheries. Senior Forest Service and NMFS scientists concluded years ago that sustaining Southeast’s salmon populations required preserving the region’s remaining roadless watersheds.
* Wildlife. Roadless areas encompass intact old growth habitat essential to many species. Roads, on the other hand, adversely impact wildlife, including some like the wolf that could wind up listed as endangered. Many wildlife biologists support application of the Roadless Rule to the Tongass.