



612 W. Willoughby Ave., Suite B
P.O. Box 21989, Juneau, AK 99802
Phone (907) 586-4351
www.seconference.org
Email info@seconference.org

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

February 19, 2018

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Southeast Conference wishes to thank you and your staff for your tremendous effort on Tongass issues, especially toward rescission of the 2016 Tongass Transition Plan and exemption of the National Forests in Alaska from the 2001 Roadless Rule - Sections 508 and 509 of the Interior Appropriations Bill respectively. Releasing Southeast Alaska from these will provide important new opportunities for economic development.

Success in moving these provisions into the Omnibus Budget Bill would provide an opportunity for much needed sales of economic timber. Southeast Conference is particularly concerned about the Forest Service's struggle in providing the Viking Lumber Mill in Craig with a consistent supply of economic timber.

Removing the twin burdens of the 2016 Transition Plan and the 2001 Roadless Rule would also assure road access for mining exploration and development and renewable energy development. There is a mineralized zone throughout Southeast Alaska, extending to the Canadian border, which would be more amenable to development with assured road access. A report by the Federal Power Authority recognized that there are over 200 potential hydropower sites in Southeast Alaska, the development of some could reduce the power costs of Southeast's 34 communities and spur opportunities for economic revitalization.

Chapter 5 of the 2016 Tongass Transition Plan removed the Transportation Utility System (TUS) Land Use Designation (LUD), which formerly allowed roads and powerlines that crossed numerous land classifications to be processed and approved under a single review standard. Without the TUS LUD, the Forest Service reviews each segment of a development proposal under the restrictions for every land classification through which the facility may pass, which only serves to increase the probability of rejection of the proposal. Restoring the TUS LUD would provide more certainty in Forest Service decision-making on power transmission lines for renewable energy projects and on road building to construct and maintain those projects.

Favorable resolution of these issues will improve Southeast's economy and increase ridership and freight transport on the Marine Highway System. There will be indirect jobs and other benefits to the region. In short, your efforts could yield great benefits to Southeast Alaska.

The Southeast Conference strongly supports your efforts. On behalf of our membership gathered during our recent Mid-Session Summit and our Board of Directors, please accept the Southeast Conference's sincere thanks and let us know if there is anything Southeast Conference can do to aid your efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Venables".

Robert Venables
Executive Director
Southeast Conference