Why Roadless?
In 2001, the U.S. Forest Service finalized the Roadless Area Conservation Rule to protect and conserve 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless area on National Forest System lands in 39 states. The 2001 Roadless Rule was created in response to decades of unmitigated road building and logging which had altered and fragmented landscapes. The growing hodgepodge of forest roads had become a management and fiscal nightmare making it nearly impossible for the Forest Service to maintain many roads to public safety and environmental standards.

The Roadless Rule provided a commonsense solution. By inventorying intact roadless areas and limiting logging and road construction, the Roadless Rule helped rein in road building and maintenance costs while conserving large tracts of undeveloped national forest land.

Although roadless areas often possess wilderness quality characteristics, the Roadless Rule provides exceptions for certain activities such as roads to connect communities, transmission lines, hydropower development, habitat restoration, reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, and public safety.

Today, forest roads still stretch more than 371,000-miles (8 times the length of the Interstate Highway System) with an estimated maintenance backlog of $3.2 billion. There is no reason to plow costly new roads into currently roadless areas. Rolling back the Roadless Rule would threaten clean drinking water, important wildlife habitat, and some of the best hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities of any of our public lands.

Roadless Areas Under Threat
The Roadless Rule is under threat on multiple fronts. In Congress, appropriations bills, the farm bill, and other forest management legislation has been weighed down by anti-Roadless Rule riders that would make millions of acres of public lands subject to costly road-building and unnecessary logging.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Forest Service are working to administratively rollback the Roadless Rule. In the Tongass National Forest in Alaska protections for up to 9.4 million roadless acres are at risk. Other states are also seeking their own special Roadless Rule exemptions. Specifically, Utah has publicized their plan to remove protections from up to 4 million acres of roadless public lands in Utah.

Save Our Roadless Forests
On August 1, 2018, Senate Energy and Natural Resources (SENR) Committee Ranking Member Maria Cantwell from Washington state, along with 16 original cosponsors, introduced S.3333, the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2018. This legislation would codify the protections provided by the Roadless Rule and ensure the existing values of these public lands for future generations.

To cosponsor the Roadless Area Conservation Act contact Bryan Petit (Bryan_Petit@energy.senate.gov) on Senator Cantwell’s Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee staff.
Where We’re Going, We Don’t Need Roads
The Roadless Rule is a commonsense conservation safeguard that provides numerous benefits. From protecting watersheds that provide clean drinking water to communities, to providing unmatched opportunities for hunting fishing, and outdoor recreation, the Roadless Rule has proved itself as an indispensable tool for protecting some of the wildest areas of our national forests.

The Roadless Rule is also fiscally responsible. It saves taxpayers millions of dollars a year by limiting costly new road building and allowing the Forest Service to focus on maintaining the existing 371,581-mile network of National Forest System roads. In addition, roadless areas are an economic driver that supports jobs and contributes to the $887 billion outdoor recreation economy.

Widely Supported Then and Now
The Roadless Area Conservation Act upholds the voices of the more than 1.5 million people who commented in support of strong roadless area protections during the original roadless rulemaking process. The bill would also uphold the 9th and 10th circuit courts of appeals decisions, and the district court in the District of Columbia decision, in support of the Roadless Rule.

Case Study: Tongass National Forest in Alaska
The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska is an archipelago of islands containing some of the largest tracts of temperate old-growth rainforest in the world. At 17 million acres the Tongass is our country’s single largest national forest, of which about 9.4 million acres are inventoried roadless area. The Tongass is also the only national forest where it is still common practice to cut old-growth timber.

The Tongass’ legacy of old-growth logging has left it’s scars on the landscape and environment. There are already over 5,000 miles of permanent roads within the Tongass. Because of the harsh terrain and high costs in the region, new logging roads on the Tongass have been known to cost upwards of $500,000/mile. The result is that the Tongass Timber Program generally operates at a net loss, costing taxpayers millions of dollars a year to subsidize roads for uneconomic timber sales.

Today, timber represents less than 1% of regional employment, while the seafood industry and tourism account for 9% and 15% of regional employment respectively. The same intact forest ecosystems that inspire hundreds of thousands of tourists to visit also provide the important habitat for salmon spawning. It is clear that a sustainable economy for SE Alaska depends on it’s intact old-growth ecosystems, not more logging.