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May 15, 2006

The Honorable Greg Walden
1210 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3702

Dear Chairman Walden:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF), representing over 15,000 professional foresters in all aspects of the profession, strongly opposes any amendment to the FY 2007 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill that would prohibit the use of funds for road building in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

The Tongass National Forest occupies 16.8 million acres in Alaska. After considerable study and debate more than 14 million acres of the Tongass National Forest have been set aside as wilderness or as another restricted land use where road building is generally not permitted. Prohibiting road building on the remaining lands without site specific analysis would prevent forest managers from managing the Tongass National Forest for the full range of multiple uses allowed for under the National Forest Management Act and Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act.

There is no doubt that certain roadless areas within the Tongass might be suitable for limitations on road building, or may be appropriate for designation as wilderness areas. However, any decisions to prohibit or allow road building should be based on the knowledge and experience of forest managers, should be informed by science and studied extensively and should include adequate opportunity for public involvement

The National Forest Management Act outlines a process for the Forest Service to make decisions on land management planning and how and when our natural resources should be allocated. Amendments that would prohibit road building in the Tongass would ignore this process, the courts, local public input, science, and the experience of highly competent forest managers. Instead of intervening through this amendment, Congress should allow the Forest Service to continue with its work to revise the Tongass Forest Plan, as mandated by a recent court decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Goergen Jr.
Executive Vice-President, CEO

