



March 17, 2025

The Honorable Lisa A. Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Senator Murkowski,

We, the undersigned representatives of the Visitor Products Cluster Working Group in Southeast Alaska, write to express our deep concern regarding the recent and proposed firings of federal employees, including many from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). As commercial tourism operators who deliver services to guests visiting locations on the Tongass National Forest, we are alarmed by the potential negative impacts these personnel changes may have on our operations, businesses, and the overall visitor experience. Our busy visitor season begins on April 14, 2025.

The Tongass National Forest is a cornerstone of Southeast Alaska's tourism industry, attracting thousands of visitors each year who seek to experience its unparalleled natural beauty and recreational opportunities. Our businesses rely heavily on the support and collaboration of the USFS to ensure that these visitors have safe, enjoyable, and memorable experiences. The recent reduction in federal staffing and potential further reductions in force raises significant concerns about our ability to maintain the high standards of service and safety that our guests expect and deserve.

A prime example of the importance of the USFS's role is the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, one of the most visited USFS locations in the United States. With over 600,000 permitted commercial visitor days and more than 800,000 visitors, it is the most popular excursion for the 1.7 million cruise ship passengers that visit Juneau during the busy summer cruise season. Unfortunately, 16 of the 18 staff members at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center were recently laid off, which severely impacts the center's ability to operate effectively and provide quality experiences for visitors. The USFS staff respond to medical emergencies and prevent dangerous bear encounters, in addition to maintaining sanitation services and a consistent visitor experience.

We fear that diminished capacity of the USFS will lead to operational disruptions, negatively impacting our businesses and potentially resulting in visitors being turned away or having subpar experiences. Such outcomes would not only harm our local economy but also tarnish the reputation of Southeast Alaska as a premier travel destination.

We respectfully urge you to take immediate action to ensure that the USFS is adequately staffed to support the tourism industry in Southeast Alaska. Your leadership and support are crucial in preventing economic harm to local businesses, safeguarding the livelihoods of countless individuals, and preserving the integrity of our region's tourism sector.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We count on your prompt response and assistance.