

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 20, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to request that you provide greater flexibility in allowing Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) to meet telephonically or virtually on an expedited timeline. We have heard from a number of Alaskans who serve on RACs who are awaiting permission from the Forest Service to proceed with virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, RACs are federal advisory committees authorized under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) to evaluate and recommend how the Forest Service should spend Title II funding in the national forests they represent. Local community members and other stakeholders are appointed to these RACs by the Secretary of Agriculture and normally meet several times each year.

Most RAC funding is used to improve natural resource and recreation infrastructure, which will be extremely important as Alaskans rally to salvage and restore our summer tourism and recreation economy during the coronavirus pandemic. We understand the Ketchikan Borough RAC alone has nearly \$1 million worth of projects that are on hold while they await Forest Service permission to meet. These projects include replacing old oil stoves in recreation cabins with wood burning stoves and restoring boating docks that have not been repaired in 15 years.

Unfortunately, social distancing guidelines have made it impossible for RACs to meet in person. Delays in RAC meetings are compounded by existing Forest Service guidance that requires RACs to publish a public meeting notice 45 days in advance of a meeting. Given that Alaska has a short summer window in which to plan, approve, and execute RAC projects, it is essential that the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service move to facilitate RAC meetings without further delay.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to your timely reply.

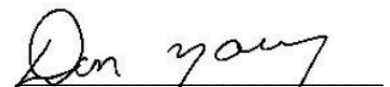
Sincerely



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska