



# State of New Mexico

## *Office of the Governor*

Bill Richardson  
*Governor*

April 17, 2009

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250-0002

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture. I look forward to working with you on the management and stewardship of national forests in New Mexico, particularly our inventoried roadless areas. As you know, New Mexico has 1.6 million acres of designated roadless national forests, which provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife, clean drinking water, and outstanding opportunities for hiking, hunting and fishing.

I am writing to ask you to protect roadless areas not only in New Mexico but across the nation. During my tenure as Governor, I, along with the vast majority of citizens in my state, have supported full protection of our national forest roadless areas consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

As you know, the status of the Roadless Rule is uncertain. Conflicting court decisions have been issued for and against the Rule by courts in California and Wyoming, and appeals are pending in the Ninth and Tenth Circuit Courts of Appeals. Under the terms of the latest court decision, most of the 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas outside of the Ninth Circuit are at risk from development that would otherwise be prohibited by the Rule. Because New Mexico joined California's lawsuit seeking to uphold the Roadless Rule, our roadless areas currently remain protected. Unfortunately, the courts could ultimately vacate or limit the Roadless Rule, and New Mexico's wild forests could lose protection.

Therefore, I ask that the U.S. Department of Agriculture issue a directive requiring Secretarial-level approval of any pending and future Forest Service projects that are inconsistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Such a directive would be consistent with President Obama's history of support for the Roadless Rule and would ensure that these public lands remain unharmed during this time of legal uncertainty.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to working with the Obama administration on this vital conservation policy. Your leadership on this issue will ensure protection of New Mexico's wild forests for future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Richardson". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Bill Richardson  
Governor of New Mexico

BR/fl