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Cantwell Introduces Legislation to Protect Almost 60 Million Acres of Pristine National Forests

*Measure to preserve hunting, fishing, other outdoor
recreational opportunities, protect America's last
remaining wild forest lands*

WASHINGTON, DC - Thursday, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) introduced legislation to protect 58.5 million acres of untouched national forests, including two million acres in Washington state. Cantwell's bill would make the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule law. The 2001 policy was developed by the Clinton Administration following three years of official review and public participation, over 600 public meetings, and hearings on each National Forest and in each Forest Service region.

“Punching roads through America’s last remaining untouched forests to subsidize short-term logging, mining, and energy development projects is unfair to future generations,” said Cantwell, a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. **“I’ve been working to protect these pristine forest lands since the day I came into office, and I’ll keep fighting to make sure this bill gets signed into law. Americans don’t want to see their hunting, fishing, and hiking areas turned into a reckless patchwork of road-building, logging, and mining.”**

The Bush Administration is pushing to overturn the existing Clinton-era Roadless Rule, which safeguards Roadless forest lands from logging, road-building, and other environmentally damaging development. By conserving our nation’s remaining pristine forestlands for future generations—while allowing hazardous fuels reduction, forest stewardship projects, and limited economic activities—the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2006 represents a balanced and reasoned approach to forest management on untouched public lands. The bill also helps address the serious fiscal challenge presented by the more than \$8.6 billion dollar maintenance and reconstruction backlog on the 386,000 miles of existing U.S. Forest Service roads.

“We shouldn’t be spending money we don’t have to subsidize the logging industry and push roads through untouched forests,” said Cantwell. **“The vast majority of Americans agree that we need to strike a fiscally and environmentally responsible balance and preserve America’s last wild lands.”**

Cantwell is the primary Senate champion of efforts to preserve America’s Roadless areas, and has made the protection of these lands a top priority since assuming office. Her first week on the job, Cantwell secured a promise from Attorney General John Ashcroft during his nomination hearing to protect the Clinton Administration’s Roadless Rule. Unfortunately, in May 2005, the Bush Administration broke that promise and repealed the entire 2001 rule, opening environmentally sensitive land to commercial exploitation. Cantwell has responded with the Roadless Area Conservation Act to permanently codify the Clinton era forestland protections. Cantwell’s bill is cosponsored by Senator Bingaman (D-NM), Ranking Member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator Harkin (D-IA), Ranking Member on the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and seven other U.S. Senators.

The 2001 Roadless Rule has received unprecedented public support, including over 4.2 million comments submitted to the U.S. Forest Service in support of the a strong protection plan. Most recently, over 250,000 Americans, including over 100 current and former Olympic athletes, filed a formal petition under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) to reverse the Bush Administration’s decision to eliminate the 2001 Roadless Rule.

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