

Contact:

Derb Carter, Director, SELC Carolinas Office
919.967.1450
Cat McCue, Communications Manager
434.977.4090

**For Immediate Release
March 9, 2006**

A statement from SELC on Governor Easley's petition to protect North Carolina roadless areas

Chapel Hill, NC – The Southern Environmental Law Center lauded Governor Mike Easley's decision today to file a petition with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture seeking full and lasting protection for almost 174,000 acres of premiere mountain forests in the Pisgah, Nantahala and Croatan national forests, which are managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Gov. Easley is only the second governor in the country to present such a petition to the Agriculture Secretary under a federal rule adopted in May 2005 pertaining to the 58.5 million 'roadless' acres on America's national forests. In December, former Virginia Governor Mark Warner petitioned for protection of roadless areas in his state; Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine reiterated the request last week.

"The strong stand that Governor Easley has taken today to defend these special places sends a clear message to Washington that he wants these areas protected for citizens and wildlife," said Derb Carter, Carolinas Office Director of the Southern Environmental Law Center, a nonprofit conservation group which has worked for two decades to protect the roadless areas in the South. "I know that the thousands of North Carolinians who want these roadless areas protected are proud of the stand Governor Easley has taken today." Over the last several years, approximately 50,000 North Carolinians have sent comments to the federal government in favor of preserving the remaining unroaded areas the national forests.

Gov. Easley's petition highlights the importance of these areas for sustaining the tourism industry in North Carolina. Many of the areas are in the viewshed of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Gov. Easley also emphasized the important role these areas play in providing clean water for downstream communities and for aquatic life. He asks that until a protective rule for North Carolina is in place, no logging, road building or other development activities take place in these roadless areas.

The petition calls on the Agriculture Secretary to protect all of North Carolina's inventoried roadless areas consistent with the provisions of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule of 2001, which covered all 58.5 million roadless acres in the U.S. In May, that rule was overturned and replaced with a process by which governors must petition the secretary to protect the roadless areas in their states. The elimination of the 2001 rule is being challenged in federal court by governors or attorney generals from four western states. On March 2, more than 250,000 citizens – including more than 5,000 from North Carolina – filed a formal request to the Bush Administration that the 2001 rule be reinstated.

Founded in 1986, SELC is the only non-profit regional organization dedicated to protecting the native forests, wetlands, air and water quality, wildlife habitat and rural landscapes in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. SELC works in partnership with more than 100 diverse groups on legal advocacy, policy reform and public education to achieve lasting environmental protections.