



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

May 10, 2005

HELP PROTECT MILLIONS OF ACRES OF PRISTINE NATIONAL FORESTS

Support The National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2005

Dear Colleague:

Last week, the U.S. Forest Service repealed the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This repeal eliminates the protections provided by the Roadless Rule, and would immediately allow road building in 34 million acres of inventoried roadless areas and the remaining 24.5 million acres would be subject to future risk. We will soon introduce legislation, the "National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act," that would codify the 2001 rule to protect the roadless areas in our National Forests.

By protecting these areas, we ensure that the pristine forests provide sources of public drinking water, undisturbed habitats for fish and wildlife and barriers against invasive plant and animal species. Under this bill, road building and economic utilization such as logging and mining would continue to be allowed on more than half of our National Forest system Lands. This legislation represents a true balance between environmental and economic concerns about our National Forests.

While the goal of our bill is to ensure that we protect our last pristine wild forests by prohibiting new road construction and reconstruction, it is not a complete ban on road building, road reconstruction or economic utilization. For instance our legislation:

- Allows new roads to be constructed in specified circumstances, such as the fight fires or when other natural disasters threaten public safety,
- Does not close any existing roads or rails and allows full-access for recreational activities such as backpacking, camping, hunting and fishing,
- Does not affect the right of access to property owned by states or individuals,
- Allows logging of certain timber to reduce the risk of wildfires, and
- Allows for expansion of oil and gas operations within existing or renewed leased areas.

The Forest Service Rule released last week requires governors to petition the Forest Service if they wish to have roadless protections reinstated on National Forest lands within their States. By requiring State action to effectuate Federal resource protection, this policy change sets a dangerous precedent. National forests are an asset of all United States citizens. The protection and management of those lands should not be based solely on local interests.

This legislation responds to the overwhelming support expressed for protecting our national forests received after several public comment periods. By the end of the 2004 comment period, the Forest Service had received over 4.2 million comments on the Roadless Rule — the vast majority of which were in support of a strong protection plan. With the protections afforded to these public lands by 2001 Roadless Rule repealed, a strong showing of Congressional support is needed now.

The National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2005 is environmentally sound legislation, and reflects the premium that Americans place on untouched lands. We urge you to join us in our effort to protect these important lands. If you would like to become an original cosponsor, please contact Amanda Murphy in Rep. Inslee's office at: x 5-6311 or Susannah Foster in Rep. Boehlert's office at: x 5-6371.

Sincerely,



JAY INSLEE



SHERWOOD BOEHLERT



NICK RAHALL



NANCY JOHNSON



DAVID WU



CHRISTOPHER SHAYS



GEORGE MILLER



JIM LEACH