

California Wilderness Coalition \_ Center for Biological Diversity \_ Defenders of Wildlife \_  
Environment California \_ Environmental Information Protection Center \_  
Natural Resources Defense Council \_ The Wilderness Society

March 30, 2006

Dale Bosworth  
Chief, US Forest Service  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Bosworth,

We are a coalition of conservationists, hunters, anglers, backpackers, hikers, and scientists. We are writing to you concerning the future of California's last wild forests and the benefits these last roadless forests provide to the citizens of California as well as the benefits they provide to all Americans who share ownership of these national treasures.

The federal roadless areas of our state provide our citizens with rich scenic and recreational opportunities and serve as an essential part of the economic foundation of our state. The citizens of California have repeatedly voiced their support for strong protection for these National Forest lands

On May 5, 2005, the Department of Agriculture announced the adoption of a final rule requiring Governors to file petitions with the Forest Service in order to receive protections for roadless areas within their states above those afforded by the forest planning process.

According to the Rule, any such petition must be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture not later than November 13, 2006. After the petition is submitted, it will be reviewed by a National Advisory Committee that will provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary on any subsequent State-specific rulemakings within 90 days.

If the petition is accepted, the Forest Service shall be directed to initiate notice and comment rulemaking to address the petition.

According to a statement by Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns concurrent with the issuance of the Rule, the rule would, "advance President Bush's commitment to cooperatively conserve inventoried roadless areas within our national forests."

Similarly, on September 6, 2005, Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey stated, "we are providing interim protection to roadless areas, pending the development of state specific rules provided for in our 2005 rulemaking."

California has led Oregon, New Mexico, and other states in challenging the legality of the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule. That suit has also been joined in Amicus filings by the states of Maine and Montana. The Rule has also been challenged in court by 20 conservation organizations.

On February 28<sup>th</sup> of this year, over a quarter of a million American's petitioned the Department of Agriculture pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act to reinstate the 2001 rule. The act requires a prompt determination by the agency.

In light of legal cloud surrounding the new rule, the unprecedented petition for reinstatement, and consistent with the administration's stated intent to "cooperatively conserve inventoried roadless areas within our national forests." and provide "interim protection to roadless areas, pending the development of state specific rules." We ask the Forest Service agree to not propose projects in inventoried roadless areas that might disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection, or degrade their special roadless qualities, and to halt and withdraw all such projects under development as long as the disposition of these areas remains unresolved.

We are particularly concerned with the Final Land and Resource Management Plans for the four Southern California National Forests. The final plans for the Cleveland, Los Padres, Angeles, and San Bernardino National Forests cover over 3,530,000 acres of land, including over 1,065,000 acres of unprotected and pristine wild lands. The plans allow motorized vehicle use and development in 90% of the forests' roadless areas. The Forest Service has proposed these plans despite assurances from Governor Schwarzenegger that the Forest Service had agreed to protect California's roadless areas from such activities.

The roadless areas of our national forests provide California's citizens not only rich scenic and recreational opportunities, but also serve as a part of the economic foundation of our state. Decisions regarding the management of these lands as roadless areas must be afforded significant consideration and weight. Moreover, decisions to take actions which may disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection, or degrade their roadless qualities and values should not be made as long as the disposition of these areas remains unresolved.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

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