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

March 13, 2006

Dear Chief Bosworth,

We are concerned about the future protection of roadless areas in Minnesota, and urge you to immediately halt planning for all logging project in roadless areas in Minnesota's National Forests.

In April 2005, the Superior National Forest unveiled its Echo Trail Forest Management Project, which proposes clear cutting nearly 16,000 acres, some of which are in federally inventoried roadless areas near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The announcement came during a period in which the U.S. Department of Agriculture was formulating a new roadless rule – a time when no new roadless area projects were to be developed or unveiled.

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 Minnesota 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 for a statewide 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."

On February 9, the Governor of Washington joined California, Oregon and New Mexico in challenging the legality of the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule. That suit has 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 28th 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 the legal cloud surrounding the new rule and 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 not to 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, including the Echo Trail Project, until the disposition of these areas has been resolved.

The roadless areas of our national forests provide Minnesotans 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 while the state is reviewing its options for the conservation of these areas.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness
401 North Third Street, Suite 290
Minneapolis, MN 55401-1475

and

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