



March 15, 2006

RE: Roadless Area Protection

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

Dear Chief Bosworth:

We are writing again on behalf of Forest Watch and the Sierra Club. Since mailing you our letter of February 21, 2006, we have learned of new proposals to build roads and log in New England's roadless areas and feel compelled to share that information with you and repeat our plea for national forest roadless area protection.

We are deeply concerned about the future of New England's wild, roadless forests and the benefits these roadless forests provide to the citizens of New England as well as the benefits they provide to all Americans who share ownership of these national treasures. Wild, roadless areas are extremely scarce and precious in New England and provide extraordinary scenery, outstanding opportunities for backcountry recreation, and a valuable economic foundation for the region.

Forest Watch is a regional, not-for-profit conservation organization with offices in Richmond, Vermont. Forest Watch has over 6,500 supporters from across the nation, though most of them reside in Vermont, New Hampshire and other New England states. Forest Watch's mission is to save and re-create wild forests, protect imperiled species, promote ecological forestry and reform public land management. Since its inception in 1994, Forest Watch has been actively involved in the planning and decision making processes on both of New England's National Forests.

The Sierra Club is a non-profit conservation organization with more than 600,000 members nationwide and individual Chapters in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The Club's Northeastern Wilderness Steering Committee, which includes forest volunteers in all three states, is deeply concerned about logging in Inventoried Roadless Areas. The Sierra Club hopes to work cooperatively with Supervisors and District Rangers in the Green and White Mountain National Forests on proposed projects within IRAs, as it has recently done at Batchelder Brook in New Hampshire. But it will oppose any projects that compromise future wilderness consideration of these public 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 on or before November 13, 2006. After a petition is submitted, it is to be reviewed by a National Advisory Committee that will provide within 90 days recommendations to the Secretary on any subsequent State-specific rulemaking. If the petition is accepted, the Forest Service shall address the petition and establish through rulemaking appropriate protections for the roadless areas.

We are pleased to learn that leaders of the U.S. Agriculture Department are strongly committed to these interim protections under the May 5, 2005 Roadless Rule. According to a statement by Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns made 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.”

We are also pleased to learn that the states of Washington, California, Oregon, and New Mexico have challenged the legality of the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule, that Amicus filings have been submitted by the states of Maine and Montana in those lawsuits, and that 20 conservation organizations have challenged the new rule in court.

As you know, citizen support for roadless area protection remains strong and widespread across the nation. On February 28th of this year, over a quarter million Americans, including members of Forest Watch and the Sierra Club, petitioned the Department of Agriculture to reinstate the 2001 Roadless Rule. We hope you will rule on this petition promptly, as required by the Administrative Procedures Act, and put the former protections back in place.

In light of the legal uncertainties surrounding the new rule, the citizen petition calling for reinstatement of the 2001 rule, and the administration's 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 that the Forest Service not propose projects in inventoried roadless areas that might disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection, or degrade their special roadless qualities, and that it halt and withdraw all such projects under development as long as the disposition of these areas remains unresolved.

We have learned of some projects (see attached list) that are currently active in or proposed for inventoried roadless areas in New England. Would you please tell us of any active projects that should be added to the list, and inform us and the public of any projects that are proposed in the future? The Forest Service failed to provide public notice that some of the listed projects would affect Inventoried Roadless Areas.

We are eager to work with local Forest Service officials in protecting New England's roadless areas. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

James M. Northup
Executive Director of Forest Watch
PO Box 188
Richmond, VT 05477
802.434.2388
jnorthup@forestwatch.org

John Harbison
Chair of the Sierra Club's Northeastern Wilderness Steering Committee
573 Coon Hill
Colchester, VT 05446
802.879.3940
johnharbison@adelphia.net

Cc: Forest Supervisors of Green Mountain and White Mountain National Forests
Enc: List of Known Projects in New England's Inventoried Roadless Areas (3/15/06)