

**National Environmental Trust \_ Sierra Club \_ Natural Resources Defense Council  
U.S. Public Interest Research Group \_ Defenders of Wildlife \_ American Lands  
The Wilderness Society \_ Alaska Rainforest Campaign \_ Earthjustice**

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March 29, 2006

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

Dear Chief Bosworth,

Our roadless national forests draw ever-increasing numbers of visitors because they provide recreation seekers a diversity of landscapes in which to pursue their outdoor passions. These vast natural treasures offer challenge, fun and relaxation in the form of hiking, kayaking, fishing, and countless other activities. In addition, roadless areas support and sustain a wide range of outdoor businesses. Roadless forests provide a wealth of environmental benefits as well. These areas not only safeguard drinking water for tens of millions of Americans, they are also the habitat for a variety of endangered, threatened and sensitive species.

The citizens of the United States have repeatedly, and in large number, voiced their support for strong protection for these National Forest lands. To date the Forest Service has received more than four million comments on the rule - 95% in favor of the complete protection of our roadless areas.

On May 5, 2005, the Department of Agriculture announced the adoption of a final rule removing the protections of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and, in its stead, created a process requiring Governors to file petitions with the Forest Service in order to have protections for roadless areas within their states considered. According to the new 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 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."

In recent months, representatives of the states of Washington, California, Oregon, Montana, Maine, and New Mexico have challenged the legality of the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule. The 2005 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 Americans petitioned the Department of Agriculture, pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act, to reinstate the 2001 rule. The Act requires a prompt consideration and response to that petition.

In light of the legal cloud surrounding the new rule, the unprecedented petition for reinstatement, and the Secretary's and Under Secretary's statements, we ask the Forest Service to cease proposing any projects in inventoried roadless areas that might disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection or degrade their roadless qualities. We also ask you to halt and withdraw all such projects under development for as long as the disposition of these areas remains unresolved.

The roadless areas of our national forests not only provide citizens rich scenic and recreational opportunities, but also serve as a part of the economic foundation of many states. 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,

Philip E. Clapp  
President  
National Environmental Trust

William Meadows  
President  
The Wilderness Society

Vawter Parker  
Executive Director  
Earthjustice

Carl Pope  
Executive Director  
Sierra Club

Gene Karpinski  
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Rodger Schlickeisen  
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