MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

March 9, 2006

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

As the Governor of North Carolina, I hereby submit the enclosed petition pursuant to 36 C.F.R. 294.10-294.18 to protect all the National Forest System inventoried roadless areas in North Carolina in accordance with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (2001 Rule). The petition includes the required information and clearly establishes the need to protect all of North Carolina's inventoried roadless areas.

In determining whether to submit this petition, the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and my staff sought stakeholder input and consulted with interested parties across a variety of sectors, including the forest products industry, local governments, and organizations concerned with environmental protection, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing, and wildlife resources. Further detail on this process is provided in the enclosed petition. Based on this work, we are confident that there is broad support for preserving the protections provided to inventoried roadless areas under the 2001 Rule.

In addition, North Carolina does not face the same concerns that influence discussions of roadless areas in other states where these areas may affect mineral, oil, or gas leases, or access to commercial timber or private lands. Of the roadless areas in North Carolina, less than 20,000 acres are in areas with management plans that emphasize commercial timber harvesting; of that acreage, less than half is actually suitable for commercial logging. North Carolina's roadless areas can be fully protected without infringing on commercial industry or land and resource rights.

In light of this, as well as the concerns I expressed to Secretary Veneman in my August 2004 letter, I urge you to develop an expedited rule-making process for states seeking to protect all inventoried roadless areas where there is broad-based support for such protection and where such protection is consistent with the existing use and

management of these lands. Such a process would provide flexibility to states, limit the resources necessary for a state rulemaking process, and quickly and efficiently provide much-needed certainty in the management of U.S. Forest Service lands.
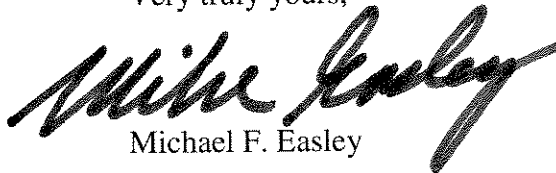
Given North Carolina's petition for full protection of our roadless areas, I further request that no projects involving road construction, logging, or other development be proposed in any of these areas during the time when this petition is being considered and until a protective state-specific rule is in place.

North Carolina's roadless areas are vital not only for their natural beauty and the recreational opportunities they offer, but also for their environmental benefits, including sources of clean water and wildlife habitat. Since 1998, more than 50,000 North Carolinians have voiced their support for our state's roadless areas through public comments, and I share their commitment to securing full protection for these areas.

North Carolina's roadless areas are unique places of unspoiled wilderness and beauty, which we value even more highly because of the intense development pressures facing our State. Recognizing the importance of these areas as natural, cultural, and economic resources for the State and its people, I submit the enclosed petition requesting full protection of these areas in accordance with the 2001 Rule. If you have questions or require additional information regarding the State's petition, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

With kindest regards, I remain

Very truly yours,

Michael F. Easley

Enclosures

MFE/jlb

cc: The Honorable Mark Rey
        Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment

        The Honorable Dale Bosworth
        Chief of the United States Forest Service