



November 12, 2004

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The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250-0100

Dear Secretary Veneman:

Thank you for your letter of July 12, 2004, asking for Governors' thoughts on your proposal to eliminate the Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("the Roadless Rule"). We are unanimous in our opposition to your proposal, and in our support for the Roadless Rule as issued on January 12, 2001.

We appreciate your view that State governments are important partners in the management of National Forest System lands. However, we do not need a special petition process that includes new procedural requirements and deadlines specific to roadless area management. Governors already have the right to petition the Forest Service to make changes in forest management rules. The proposed rule offers no further guarantee than we have now that the State's position will be adopted.

We believe it is the responsibility of the federal government, not the States, to steward public lands, including development and application of consistent, proactive standards for national forest roadless areas. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule was established through unprecedented public involvement, including public hearings in each affected State that demonstrated strong support for a national policy to protect the remaining roadless areas. Obviously, these areas could be changed forever – and their roadless qualities permanently lost – by the decision at any point in time to allow road building. The Rule achieved a reasonable balance among competing interests and fairly addressed concerns raised during the comment process.

Secretary Veneman, only a minority of our national forestlands remains roadless and wild, and our constituents want to preserve and protect them for their rare beauty, clean drinking water, valuable recreation, and hunting and fishing opportunities. As Secretary of Agriculture you have a responsibility not only to develop but also to protect and conserve. As Governors, we believe you should take a national approach to protecting these lands, consistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Decisions made out in the field by local agency officials do not always take into account cumulative impacts across the national landscape, or the real value of disappearing wildlands to the nation as a whole.

We see no reason to eliminate the Roadless Rule, and many reasons to keep and defend it. We urge you to do so. We also request that you extend the comment period on your draft rule by 30 days in order to give our State agencies adequate opportunity to evaluate the potential legal, administrative, and on-the-ground impacts of the proposed state petition process. Finally, we suggest you address the maintenance needs of existing roads before expanding the acreage potentially open for road development.

Sincerely,



Bill Richardson
New Mexico



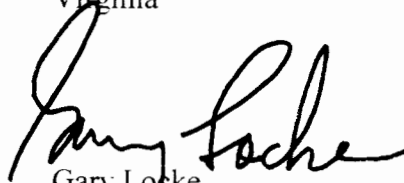
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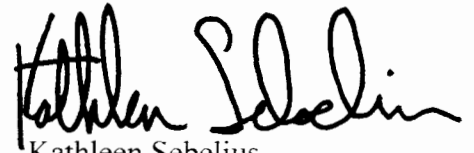
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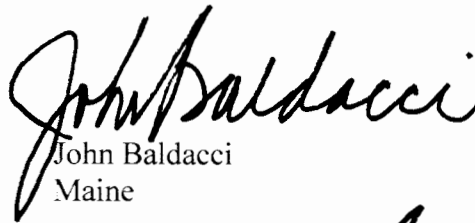
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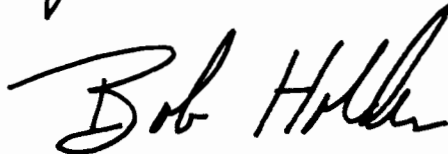
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