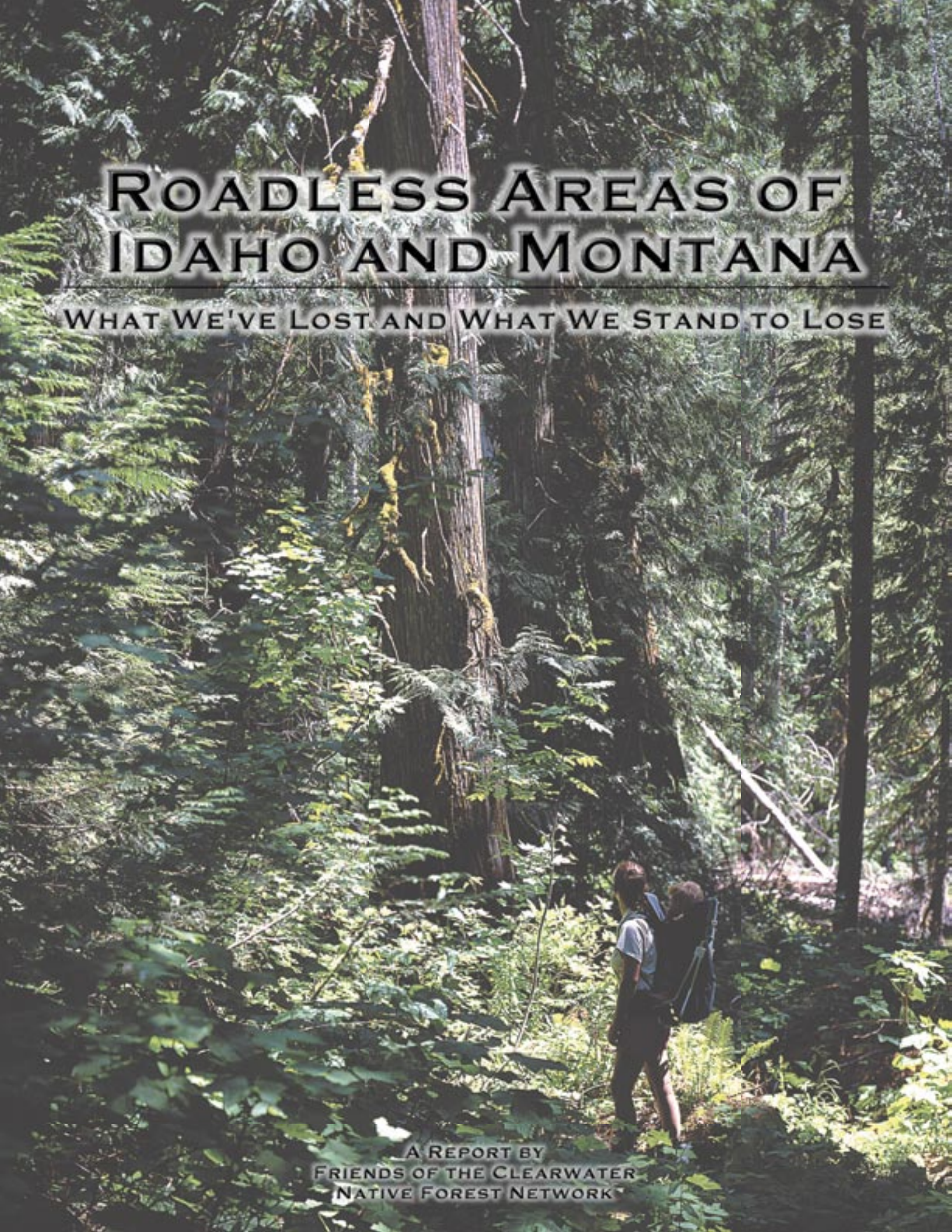


Roadless Areas of Idaho and Montana

What We've Lost and What We Stand to Lose

A Report by
Friends of the Clearwater
Native Forest Network

Northern Rockies Roadless Facts

There are nearly sixteen million acres of roadless areas in Idaho and Montana's National Forests that are protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If the Roadless Rule is reversed by the Bush administration, nine and a half million acres, or 60.5 percent of those areas would be immediately made available for logging and road-building.

State	Roadless Acres	Acres of Roadless Areas at Risk	Percentage at Risk
Idaho	9,322,000	5,666,000	60.8
Montana	6,397,000	3,844,000	60.1
TOTAL	15,719,000	9,510,000	60.5

Source: US Forest Service[1]

There are currently over sixty-seven thousand miles of roads traversing Idaho and Montana's National Forests, more than six times the amount of roads in the state highway system for the two states. Of these roads, more than forty percent are open only to logging trucks and other high clearance vehicles. Thirty five percent are closed to all traffic. Only about fourteen percent are open to the general public.

State	USFS Closed Roads	USFS High Clearance Only	USFS Open to Public Passenger Vehicles	USFS Total	State Highway Total
Idaho	12,608	14,461	7,546	34,614	4,955
Montana	10,987	12,443	9,102	32,531	6,709
Total	23,594	26,903	16,647	67,145	11,664
Percent	35	40	25		

Source: US Forest Service[2]

The current maintenance backlog for these existing roads is more than $1.3 billion.

	Deferred Maintenance		Capital Improvements		
State	Critical	Non-Critical	Critical	Non-Critical	Total
Idaho	$129,547,529	$410,232,582	$31,499,387	$89,020,853	$660,300,351
Montana	$98,826,658	$390,853,423	$13,143,622	$166,368,819	$669,192,523
Total	**$228,374,187**	**$801,086,005**	**$44,643,009**	**$255,389,672**	**$1,329,492,874**

Source: US Forest Service[3]

[1] Final Environmental Impact Statement - Appendix A Inventoried Roadless Area Acreage Categories Of Nfs Lands Summarized By State, November 13, 2000

[2] Official road mileage according to the Forest Service system-wide fiscal year 2002 Road Accomplishment Report.

[3] United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service. 2003. *Fiscal year 2004 Forest Service Budget Justification.* (Washington, DC).

[4] Dombeck, Mike, Chief, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, An Opportunity; December 29, 1999

[5] Anderson, Michael, 1997. "Idaho's Vanishing Wild Lands: A Status Report on Roadless Areas in Idaho's National Forests," The Wilderness Society, July, 1997.

Introduction

Between 1992 and 1997, nearly sixteen million acres of forest, farms, and open space across the nation were converted to urban or other uses.[4] As America's population centers continue to grow and wild and open spaces disappear, our national forests become more and more valuable.

In 1998, the U.S. Forest Service responded to the nation's need and desire to protect its last wild forests by placing an eighteen month moratorium on the construction of new roads in the last remaining unprotected and unroaded, or "roadless", forests on the national forest system. The agency then began a public rulemaking process to permanently protect the last intact third of the national forest system. By January 2001, after holding more than six-hundred public hearings and meetings and receiving 1.6 million public comments—over ninety-five percent in favor of complete protection— the process was complete. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which protects the remaining inventoried roadless areas on our national forests from most logging, road construction, drilling and mining, was signed into law.

If the Bush administration reverses the Roadless Area Conservation rule, 60.5%, or more than 9.5 million acres, of the last remaining roadless areas on Idaho and Montana's National Forests would immediately be made available for to logging and road-building.

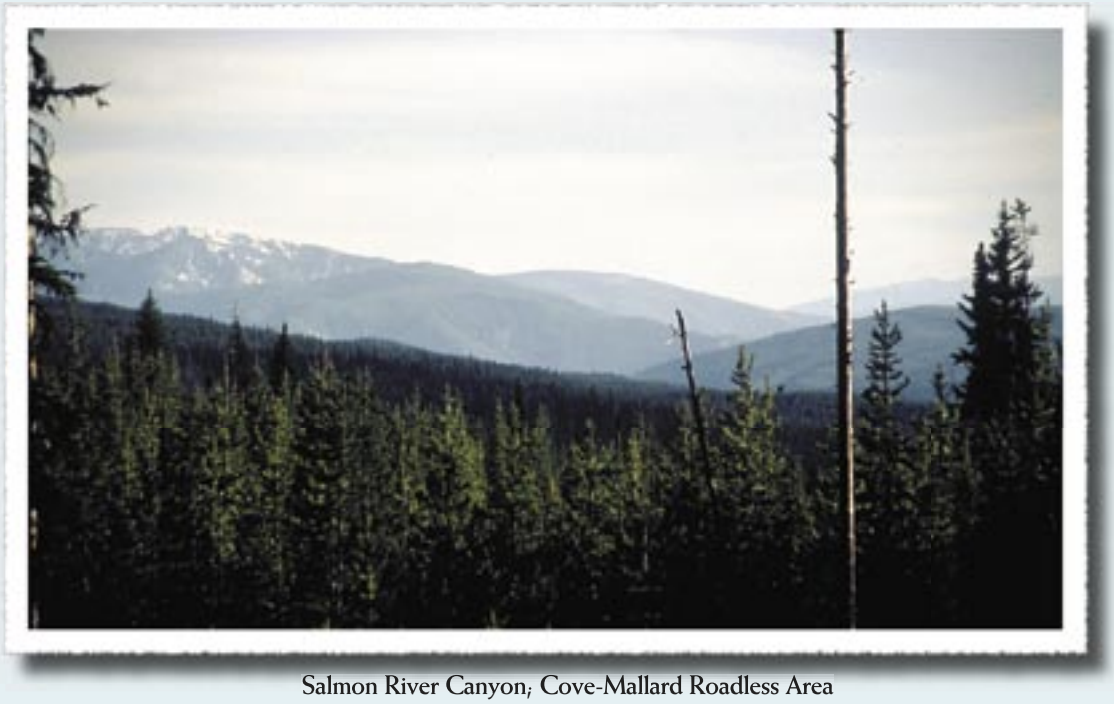
But just as the Roadless Rule was scheduled to take effect, the Bush administration moved to block it. First, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card froze its implementation. Then Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman postponed its effective date, and announced the Bush administration's intentions to amend the rule and reopen the public comment process. On December 23, 2003, while families across America gathered for the holiday season, the Bush administration exempted the largest national forest in the country, the Tongass Rainforest of Alaska, from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Since then, the administration has announced plans to revise or remove protection for roadless areas throughout the rest of the country, including the Northern Rockies.

The Northern Rockies are the last place in the lower 48 that still has all of the species found there before European settlement, including big predators like the gray wolf, grizzly bear, and Canada lynx, as well as steelhead and bull trout. But in the twenty seven years since the Forest Service conducted its inventory of the last wild and intact roadless areas on the National Forest system, over a million roadless acres have been logged and roaded in Idaho alone.[5] Nevertheless, 15.7 million acres of roadless areas remain on the National Forests of Idaho and Montana. These vital landscapes are already under threat of being overrun with rampant and growing off-road and all-terrain vehicle use. If the Bush administration reverses the Roadless Rule, these problems would be compounded by opening 9.5 million acres of these areas to logging and road construction.

The national forests of Idaho and Montana are already traversed by over sixty-seven thousand miles of roads, more than six times the number of miles in the entire state highway system for the two states. There is a maintenance backlog on these existing roads of over $1.3 billion

This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in Idaho and Montana prior to the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and just a few of the roadless areas we stand to lose should the Roadless Rule be reversed.

Cove and Mallard Roadless Areas



Salmon River Canyon; Cove-Mallard Roadless Area
Photo by Gary Macfarlane

The 76,000 acre Cove and Mallard Roadless Areas are critical links in the Greater Salmon-Selway Ecosystem - the single largest intact forest ecosystem in the lower 48 states. The area's relatively gentle terrain is an exception amongst the rugged wildlands of central Idaho, making it valuable both as an important biological corridor, and for its prime, accessible timber.

A rolling forest of lodgepole pine interspersed with spruce, fir and larch, and dotted with creeks, meadows and streams dominates the Cove portion of the area, with elevations ranging from 2,400 to over 6,600 feet. The Mallard portion of the area is a high mountain paradise defined by the headwaters of Big Mallard Creek and its tributaries with elevations ranging from 5,200 to over 7,600 feet.

The area is home to deer, elk, moose, cougar and some of the last healthy populations of an array of threatened and endangered species, including bull trout, Chinook salmon, steelhead, westslope cutthroat trout, fisher, martin, lynx, wolverine, river otter, gray wolf, bald eagle, golden eagle, boreal and flamulated owl, goshawk and winter wren. It is also prime habitat for grizzly bear.

The Cove-Mallard region was the site of the highly

Clearcut ; Cove-Mallard Roadless Area
Photo by Gary Macfarlane

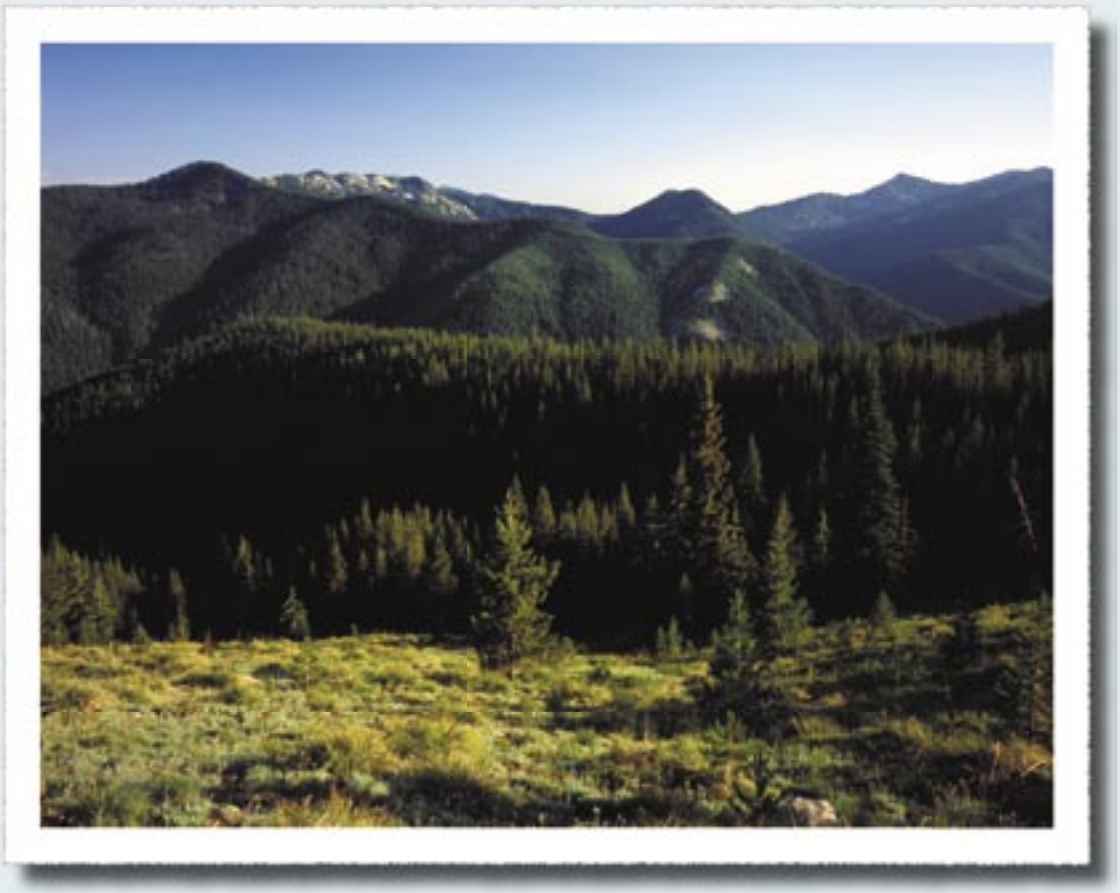
controversial Cove-Mallard timber sales of the 1990s, which would have destroyed the roadless areas by punching in 145 miles of new roads and hauling out 16,000 truckloads of timber (82 million board feet) at an estimated cost of $6 million to taxpayers. Approximately twenty-percent of the projects were carried out , affecting 10,000 acres. Vociferous public opposition, legal challenges, and protests delayed the rest of the sales until they were halted by the 1999 moratorium on road construction into roadless areas, and then granted protection by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule in 2001. Today nearly 70,000 acres of Cove-Mallard are still wild and roadless, protected by the Roadless Rule. If the Bush administration reverses the rule, Cove-Mallard would once again be open to the bulldozer and chainsaw, and, conservationists fear, the Cove-Mallard sales will arise again, to threaten the remaining wildlands of north-central Idaho.

Stream, Cove-Mallard Roadless Area
Photo by Greg Mack

Road Construction, Cove-Mallard Roadless Area
Photo by Greg Mack

Cove and Mallard Roadless Areas - Nez Perce National Forest - Idaho

Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area



Located Sixty miles northeast of Orofino, in Idaho's moist panhandle, the 260,000 acre Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area is one of the largest unprotected areas anywhere in the contiguous 48 states.

In the high country, extensive lodgepole pine and mountain hemlock forests mingle with subalpine meadows, high mountain lakes, and craggy peaks. Impressive pockets of old growth western red cedar, western hemlock, and western white pine, some quite massive, remain in the lower elevations. Rare inland coastal rainforest habitat is well developed in Isabella Creek. Here, large old growth red alder, pacific yew and many different ferns thrive among the arboreal giants. Thirty-eight mountain lakes are large enough to be named, with Heart Lake being the largest at thirty-five acres.

The area is a sanctuary for abundant wildlife including pileated woodpecker, northern goshawk, bear, moose, elk, mule and whitetail deer, pine marten, gray wolf, lynx, wolverine, and a productive mountain goat population. The healthy deer and elk populations feed a growing population of wolves. There may be as many as five wolf packs in the North Fork Clearwater country. High mountain lakes with cutthroat trout lure many fly-fishers in the summer. On the south side, Isabella Creek is habitat for bull trout, westslope cutthroat and kokanee salmon.

Mallard-Larkins has a long history of support for wilderness protection. A small portion of the high country was designated as a Pioneer Area (about 30,000 acres). Unfortunately, road-building and logging have degraded parts of this roadless area.

In addition, motorized vehicles have intruded into parts of the area including the Elizabeth Lakes region. Still, most of the area is extremely wild with many unique features.

The removal of a few dirt, logging roads would combine the Great Burn, Bighorn-Weitas, Mallard-Larkins, Pot Mountain, and Upper North Fork areas into a single 900,000 acre roadless area.

The Mallard-Larkins provides some of the best deer and elk hunting in the region. Outside of hunting season, the area offers excellent opportunities for solitude.

Backpacking from the low elevations to the subalpine areas, is truly wondrous. Fishing is popular in the high mountain lakes and in the St. Joe, North Fork and the Little North Fork of the Clearwater River. The St. Joe River is a National Wild and Scenic River. Opportunities for camping abound throughout. Swimming, bird watching, mountain climbing, backcountry skiing, and photography are some of the other activities available in the area.

While the Mallard-Larkins roadless area receives strong public support for wilderness protection and has been proposed for protection in The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA), it is currently protected only by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Photos: Facing page- the heart of the Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area, from Surveyor's Ridge. Top - Kelly and Branden deep in the heart of the roadless area, the Heritage Grove has 500 year-old cedars over 150′ tall and 6′ in diameter. Bottom- - Snow Peak, one of the most dramatic skylines in N. Idaho.
by Chuck Pezeshki

Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area - Clearwater and Idaho Panhandle National Forests - Idaho

Wing-Twentymile Roadless Area

Ancient Forest, Wing-Twentymile Roadless Area
Photo by Chuck Pezeshki

The Otter Wing-Twentymile Roadless Area is a case study of what can happen to a pristine roadless area without permanent protection. The area lies due north of the Gospel Hump Wilderness and slopes down to the South Fork of the Clearwater. It is a region of critical wildlife and fish habitat and previously contained about 60,000 acres of roadless land. Today, only 20,000 acres remain roadless, and these are endangered as well.

During debates on the Gospel Hump Wilderness bill, the Wing-Twentymile Area was singled out for its critical importance for wildlife because of its low elevation. These lowland forests contain important winter range Pacific yew habitat for moose, rocky crags for mountain

Sourdough Mountain, pictured here, has since been logged
Photo by Chuck Pezeshki

Clearcut Ancient Forest, Wing-Twentymile Roadless Area
Photo by Chuck Pezeshki

goats, large stands of ancient trees, and crucial fisheries for imperiled steelhead and bull trout, and pure strains of cutthroat. The area also houses eagles, pine marten, lynx, wolverine, elk, deer, mountain lion, goshawk, and wolves.

But because of the economic value of its timber, the area was not included in the Gospel Hump Wilderness, and all of the roadless lands not included in the Wilderness bill were wrongly omitted from the subsequent roadless inventory.

Four timber sales were approved in a 1989 EIS that eventually developed about two thirds of the area, punching in a dozen miles of new roads, and clearcutting 694 acres of ancient forests. Wing and Twentymile Creeks are now ringed with roads and important tributaries to Tenmile Creek have been developed. Johns Creek, which has both steelhead and bull trout, and is being considered for wild river status, is the only drainage to escape significant development.

What remains of the area are is still the best habitat left in the South Fork Clearwater, but absent roadless area protection there is nothing to prevent the final logging of the last of Wing-Twentymile.

Wing-Twentymile Roadless Area

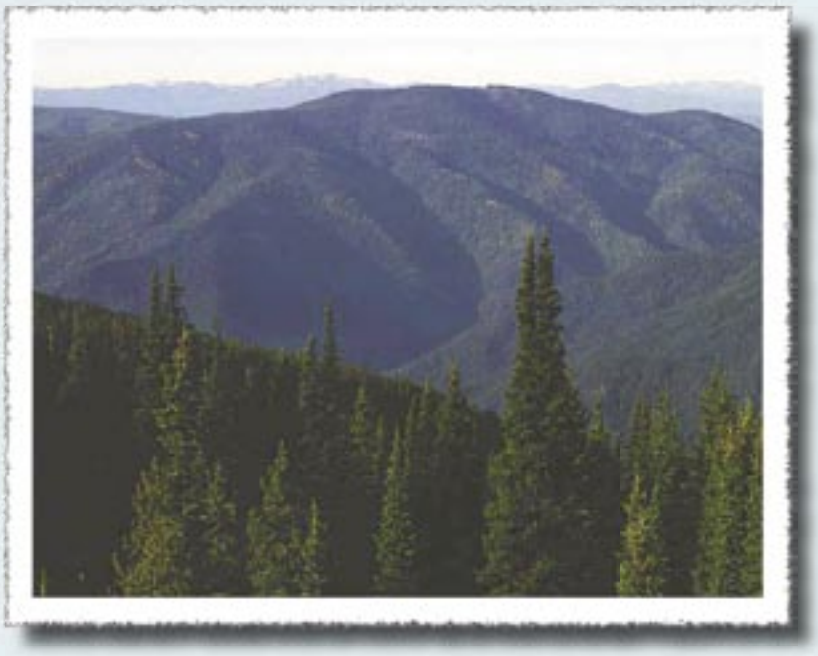
-

Nez Perce National Forest

-

Idaho

The Meadow Creek Roadless Area



The 200,000 acre Meadow Creek Roadless Area is a spectacular and still intact drainage. According to the Forest Plan for the Nez Perce National Forest, its, "opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation are outstanding."

One of the most outstanding qualities of Meadow Creek is its clean, cold waters. Starting at its headwaters in the south, Meadow Creek flows first northeast through lush meadows which give the drainage its name. It then curves back west and north as it rushes down steep and narrow valleys, opening up before it joins the river just above Selway Falls. It is the most important tributary of the Selway River not only because of the clear water it provides, but also because it nourishes the healthiest populations of steelhead trout and Chinook salmon, as well as Bull and Westslope cutthroat trout in Idaho today. Many animals use the safety of Meadow Creek to navigate between adjacent Wilderness areas, and many other animals make their homes in the ancient cedar lined Meadow Creek. Gray wolves, elk and bald eagle depend on the area's intact forests for survival. Hunters, photographers, birders, and fishermen alike rely on Meadow Creek's quiet seclusion.

For decades the area has been a priority in proposals for additions to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. The reversal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule would open large swaths of this roadless area to road construction and logging.

Recently, over 25 miles of fire line were bulldozed into this remote roadless area during the Slims and Poet Fires. Ancient trees cut along the fire lines were sold at bargain-basement rates. Now, salvage sales scheduled in the adjacent Red River drainage are expected to spill over, full-bore, into Meadow Creek, as a result of the misnamed Health Forest Initiative. The fate of Meadow Creek hangs in the balance.

Meadow Creek Roadless Area - Nez Perce National Forest - Idaho

The Bee Top and Scotchman Roadless Areas

Rein Atteman of The Lands Council in the Timber Sale Area

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest recently issued a public announcement for the proposed Rising Cougar Timber Sale. This project is located on the northeastern shore of Lake Pend Oreille, just outside Clark Fork and East Hope, Idaho near the Montana border. The current proposal would log nearly 6,000 acres. Two thirds of the logging would be in the Bee Top and Scotchman Roadless Areas. Under this proposal, National Fire Plan money, specifically allocated to protect communities and homes from wildfire, will be used to log recreation areas currently protected under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Much of the area proposed for logging is far from homes and communities. The sale would also take place within a Grizzly Bear Management Unit, three Old Growth Management Units and in the already heavily logged Lightning Creek Watershed that has threatened bull trout population. Lightning Creek is also proposed for bull trout critical habitat designation.

Bee Top and Scotchman Roadless Areas - Idaho Panhandle National Forest - Idaho

Sage Creek Roadless Area

The Sage Creek Roadless Area Roadless Area and JR Simplot's Smoky Canyon Phosphate Mine

In September of 2003, despite promises by the Bush administration to uphold the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U. S. Forest Service granted J.R. Simplot Company a permit to build new roads into the Sage Creek Roadless Area of Idaho's Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The roads would allow Simplot to access and drill twenty-five exploratory holes for phosphate mining. Phosphate is used primarily as an industrial fertilizer.

The area contains sources of drinking water for local families, as well as important habitat for elk, mule deer, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout. In 1998, the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Supervisor "strongly recommended" that this area of the Sage Creek Roadless Area be closed to phosphate mining due to its "sensitive nature and the importance of the surface resources."*

Peter Riede, a local resident and two conservation organizations were recently granted their appeal of the decision asking the Interior Department's Board of Land Appeals and the US Forest Service to reverse the illegal permitting of phosphate exploration. According to Marv Hoyt, Idaho Director for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. "The decision to allow construction of roads, test holes, and wells understated, and in some cases simply ignored, the harmful effects Simplot's activities would have in this area. This decision set an alarming precedent by the two agencies to allow development in protected roadless lands."

Deer Creek flows through Peter Riede's Afton ranch. According to Riede, "Fishing, hunting, wildlife, water quality, and property values all would be negatively affected, but the agencies ignored or downplayed the potential degradation of those values."

*February 23, 1998 letter to then Idaho State Director for the BLM.

Sage Creek Roadless Area - Caribou-Targhee National Forest - Idaho

Bridger Roadless Area

The Northern Peaks of the Bridger Roadless Area
Photo by Phil Knight.

The Bridger Roadless Area straddles the steep limestone ridge of the Bridger Mountain Range in southwest Montana. Listed at 45,402 acres by the Forest Service in 1987, it has been reduced considerably by logging and road-building. Up to 16,664 acres of this roadless area could be immediately opened to development if the Roadless Area Conservation Rule is reversed.

Popular with hikers, backcountry skiers, mountain bikers, hunters and other recreationists, the Bridger Roadless Area lies close to the growing city of Bozeman. A National Recreation Trail traverses the roadless area, while the even more popular Bridger Ridge Trail follows the top of the spectacular mountain range, reaching over 9,200 feet.

Creeks that feed the headwaters of the Missouri River originate in the Bridger Roadless Area and provide habitat for native fish such as the westslope cutthroat trout. The area is characterized by steep, narrow limestone peaks, remote cirques and long, narrow drainages, open, park-like stands of old growth Douglas fir, dense lodgepole pine forests, and high wildflower meadows. Wildlife that depend on the Bridger Roadless Area include mountain goat, black bear, mule deer, mountain lion, moose, and the large Bridger elk herd. Also found here is a remnant population of wolverine.

The Bridger Roadless Area is also a key wildlife corridor connecting the Yellowstone region with the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem and points north to the Yukon. Thousands of migrating raptors utilize the updrafts from the Bridger range every fall and spring on the their journeys north and south.

Lewis and Clark passed just west of this range in 1805, and Clark led a party over the Bozeman Pass, which separates the Bridger and Gallatin ranges, on their return journey in 1806.

Bridger Roadless Area - Gallatin National Forest - Montana

The Madison Roadless Area

The Upper Taylor Fork Drainage, Madison Range
Photo by Phil Knight

The 149,259 acre Madison Roadless Area was released from protection as a Wilderness Study Area in the 1983 Lee Metcalf Wilderness Bill. Since then, logging and road-building have degraded some of the area. Although no longer eligible for Wilderness designation, this is a significant roadless area with many important attributes.

The Madison Range is the second highest in Montana, with numerous eleven thousand foot peaks. An important component of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem, the area contains essential grizzly bear and wolf habitat, and winter and summer range for large herds of moose, elk and mule deer. It is also home to mountain lions, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, wolverine and marten. The roadless area is a source of clean water flowing into the Gallatin and Madison rivers, some of the nation's premier sport fisheries.

Threats to the roadless area, which would intensify if the Roadless Area Conservation Rule is overturned, include oil and gas development in the Overthrust Belt, and logging and road-building in places like the upper Taylor Fork, Beaver Creek and Buck Creek drainages. The area is also threatened by heavy use by off road vehicles and snowmobiles. The northern end of the roadless area is also being threatened by extensive trophy home and resort development associated with the Yellowstone Club and Big Sky ski areas.

Madison Roadless Area - Gallatin National Forest - Montana

The Gallatin Range Roadless Area

A Hiker Explores a Remote Corner of the Hyalite Roadless Area
Photo by Phil Knight

The Gallatin Divide, Gallatin Fringe, and Hyalite Roadless Areas are part of a 202,000 acre roadless area, the largest unprotected roadless piece of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Gallatin Range Roadless Area stretches from just south of Bozeman, Montana, all the way to the northwest corner of Yellowstone National Park.

It would be difficult to overstate the values of this superlative mountain range. People have lived in the area for at least 11,000 years, as indicated by shaped arrow points and rock chips. The Lewis and Clark expedition traveled just north of the Gallatin Range when Clark led a return party over the Bozeman Pass in 1806. Hundreds of miles of public trails now traverse the Gallatin Range, including the spectacular Gallatin Divide Trail, one of the nation's premier mountain crest trails.

Some of the last best habitat for grizzly bears is found here, as well as herds of bighorn sheep, mountain goat, mule deer and other ungulates. The range contains essential wintering and birthing grounds for some of the nation's largest elk herds. Some of the best elk and deer hunting in the world is also found here, as well as creeks feeding the blue-ribbon fisheries of the Madison, Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers, and the sources of Bozeman's drinking water. Wolves are re-inhabiting the range after a seventy-year absence, and the threatened lynx is believed to survive in the Gallatins. Twenty-three plant and animals species listed as threatened, endangered or sensitive exist here. This range is also an essential wildlife corridor linking the Yellowstone region with the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem and points north to the Yukon.

One hundred and fifty one thousand acres are currently protected as the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, but only the Roadless Area Conservation Rule protects the remaining 51,000 acres from road construction and logging.

Gallatin Range Roadless Area - Gallatin National Forest - Montana

In January of 2001, after thirty years of debate and the largest public participation process in US history, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was signed into law. The Roadless Rule, as enacted, protects the last intact forests on America's National Forest System, their wildlife habitat, their clean air and water, their opportunities for recreation and their unspoiled open spaces for current and future generations of Americans.

But now the Bush administration is threatening to unravel the rule, opening these last wild forests once more to road construction and logging.

If the Bush administration reverses the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, 60.5%, or more than 9.5 million acres, of the last remaining roadless areas on Idaho and Montana's National Forests would be opened to logging and road-building.

This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in Idaho and Montana prior to the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and just a few of the roadless areas we stand to lose should the rule be reversed.

Please, contact Dale Bosworth, Chief of the US Forest Service and ask him to keep the Roadless Area Conservation Rule intact, and to protect America's last wild forests. Forever.

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