



ROADLESS AREAS OF THE NORTH WOODS

WHAT WE'VE LOST AND WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

A REPORT BY
FRIENDS OF THE BOUNDARY WATERS WILDERNESS
HABITAT EDUCATION CENTER
NORTHWOODS WILDERNESS RECOVERY

NORTH WOODS ROADLESS FACTS

Roadless Areas at Risk

There are 147,000 acres of roadless areas in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin's National Forests that are protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If the rule is reversed by the Bush administration, those areas will be opened to logging and road-building. These last intact roadless forests make up only two percent of the national forests in these three states, and less than six tenths of a percent of the region's available timber.

State	National Forest Acres	Roadless Acres	Percentage of National Forest
Michigan	2,858,000	16,000	.6
Minnesota	2,838,000	62,000	2.2
Wisconsin	1,523,000	69,000	4.5
Total	7,219,000	147,000	2

Source: US Forest Service¹

Forest Roads

There are currently more than twenty thousand miles of roads traversing Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin's National Forests. This figure is nearly ten times greater per square mile than the state highway system for the three states. Of these roads, half are open only to logging trucks and other high clearance vehicles. Only about twenty-six percent are open to the general public. The current road maintenance backlog for these existing Forest Service roads totals nearly \$140 million.

State	USFS Closed Roads	USFS High Clearance Only	USFS Open to Public Passenger Vehicles	USFS Total	Maintenance Backlog
Michigan	3,234	5,822	1,624	10,681	\$76,429,839
Minnesota	1,089	2,577	1,121	4,788	\$19,656,431
Wisconsin	646	1,676	2,512	4,834	\$43,839,646
Total	4,969	10,076	5,259	20,304	\$139,925,916
Percent	24	50	26		

Source: US Forest Service²

Public Support for Roadless Area Protection

Ninety-six percent of the nearly 76,000 comments received by the Forest Service on the proposed rule from the citizens of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin supported the complete protection of all roadless areas.

State	Comments in Support	Total Comments	Percentage in Support
Michigan	29,497	31,398	94
Minnesota	23,593	24,291	97
Wisconsin	19,512	20,278	96
Total	72,602	75,967	96

Source: US Forest Service³

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).

INTRODUCTION

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is the most significant public lands conservation measure of recent years. Protecting nearly 60 million acres of national forest land from logging and road-building, including 147,000 acres of the north woods in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, the rule is a bold counter to the rapid development of our American landscapes.

The Roadless Rule was significant not only in scope, but also in process. It was formulated through the most extensive federal rule-making process in history. This process involved nearly three years of research and analysis, more than 600 public meetings, and 1.6 million public comments, of which more than 95 percent were in favor of complete roadless area protection. In Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, 96 percent of the 75,967 comments supported the Roadless Rule. When the Roadless Rule was completed in January 2001, people across the country celebrated and praised the efforts of the Forest Service to preserve America's forest legacy for future generations.

But just as the new rule was scheduled to take effect, the Bush administration moved to block it. The administration delayed implementation of the rule and instead announced plans to amend the rule and reopen the public comment process. Then, on the eve of the 2003 Christmas holiday, the administration exempted the Tongass Rainforest of Alaska from the Roadless Rule. The Tongass is the largest national forest in the country and considered a crown jewel of the national forest system. The administration has since announced its intentions to exclude roadless areas throughout the rest of the country, including those in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, from protection under the rule.

Only about 17 percent of the national forests in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin remain wild and intact. Of these areas, the majority have been protected by Congress. There remain, however, 147,000 roadless acres protected only by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If the Bush administration reverses the Roadless Rule, these areas would be opened to logging and road-building. The national forests of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are already traversed by more than 20,000 miles of roads, nearly ten times the roads per square mile than in the state highway system for the three states. There is a maintenance backlog on these already existing forest roads of nearly \$140 million. This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin prior to the enactment of the Roadless Rule, and a few of the roadless areas we stand to lose if the Roadless Rule is reversed.

IF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION REVERSES THE ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE, ALL OF THE ROADLESS AREAS IN MINNESOTA, MICHIGAN AND WISCONSIN'S NATIONAL FORESTS WILL BE OPENED TO LOGGING AND ROAD-BUILDING.

KAWISHIWI LAKE TO SAWBILL ROADLESS AREA



The 16,000 acre Kawishiwi Lake to Sawbill Roadless Area lies adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), the nation's premier canoe country. The area was inventoried during the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) in 1979. A small portion (880 acres) of the original RARE II area was added to the BWCAW under the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act.

The Kawishiwi Lake to Sawbill Area is a narrow strip, averaging only two miles wide. Rolling hills within the area provide scenic views of winding streams, lakes, and ponds. There are several named lakes within the area and a number of unnamed ponds. The area's numerous wetlands provide excellent moose habitat.

Much of the Kawishiwi Lake to Sawbill Area was logged in the 1940s and 1950s. More recent logging has significantly diminished the area's wild character. Near Coffee Lake, there are signs of recent clearcuts. Additionally, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are accessing the area via an unmapped travel way approximately a quarter mile from the Hog Creek boat access. Clearcuts riddle its boundary along Kawishiwi Lake. The extent of logging and development have eliminated the area from inclusion in a recent citizens' inventory of roadless areas.

**KAWISHIWI
LAKE TO
SAWBILL
ROADLESS
AREA**

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**SUPERIOR
NATIONAL
FOREST**

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MINNESOTA

-

LOGGED

LITTLE INDIAN SIOUX ROADLESS AREA



The Little Indian Sioux Roadless Area is located approximately twenty seven miles northwest of Ely, Minnesota and is adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The area was originally inventoried at 1,295 acres, but 381 acres were added to the BWCAW in 1978. The Little Indian Sioux Area's forest is primarily black spruce and aspen, and portions of the areas are very swampy. The area has been heavily impacted since the original inventory and prior to the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. On a trail that traverses the center of the area, visitors have noted recent clear cuts with bulldozer tracks and smoldering brush piles.

LITTLE INDIAN
SIOUX
ROADLESS
AREA
-
SUPERIOR
NATIONAL
FOREST
-
MINNESOTA
-
LOGGED

THE BALDPATE LAKE ROADLESS AREA



The 1,625 acre Baldpate Lake Roadless Area is located north of the Echo Trail, adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Baldpate Lake itself was added to the BWCAW along with 160 acres of the area in 1978.

Vegetation in the northwest part of the area includes pine, spruce, aspen, and maple. Bogs contain cedar, black spruce, and alder. The area is popular with cross-country skiers, berry pickers, and hunters.

The Stuart Portage on the western edge of the area provides ample opportunity for hiking and solitude. The ridge and bog, presence of fire scars, and spectacular old growth pines all contribute to a feeling of remoteness and wildness. In the absence of the Roadless Rule, and under the draft forest plan for the Superior National Forest, this area would be open to logging with no protections.

BALDPATE
LAKE
ROADLESS
AREA
-
SUPERIOR
NATIONAL
FOREST
-
MINNESOTA
-
THREATENED



THE MISSISSIPPI CREEK ROADLESS AREA



The 5,670 acre Mississippi Creek Roadless Area is an intact, functioning ecosystem distinct from the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). The northern portion of the area lies within the Cascade Lake Potential Research Natural Area.

This area received a high biodiversity ranking from the Minnesota County Biological Survey. Nearly half of the area is covered with mature forest, including spruce, aspen, birch, and cedar with jack pine and tamarack. There is one small lake, Babble Lake, which offers solitude and great hiking trails. In the absence of the Roadless Rule, and under the draft forest plan for the Superior National Forest, this area would be open to logging with no protections.



MISSISSIPPI
CREEK
ROADLESS
AREA

-
SUPERIOR
NATIONAL
FOREST

-
MINNESOTA

-
THREATENED

THE WILLOW CREEK ROADLESS AREA



The Willow Creek Roadless Area comprises 1,360 roadless acres contiguous to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and approximately 20 miles inland of Lake Superior. The area is located directly north of Forest Road 170 and northeast of Crescent Lake. It buffers Kinogami Lake, a part of the Boundary Waters, and Willow Creek itself, which connects Kinogami and Crescent Lakes. This area was part of the larger Baker-Homer-Brule Lakes area when it was originally inventoried during the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II), but never received any formal protection. In the absence of the Roadless Rule, and under the draft forest plan for the Superior National Forest, this area would be open to logging with no protections.

WILLOW
CREEK
ROADLESS
AREA
-
SUPERIOR
NATIONAL
FOREST
-
MINNESOTA
-
THREATENED



CASCADE/NORWICH PLAINS



Trail marker in a clearcut section of the North Country Trail, in an area that was formerly a part of the Cascade Roadless Area

Photo by Henry W. Peters

The Cascade/Norwich Plains area is located on the north central portion of the Ottawa National Forest, just south and east of the west branch of the Wild and Scenic Ontonagon River, 35 miles east of Ironwood Michigan

A hardwood fir forest now covers the gentle terrain of this former glacial lake bed, which is traversed by Bebo, Match, Mill, and Livingston creeks. Black bear, deer, grouse, beaver, coyote, fox, mink, woodcock, ducks, geese, and snowshoe hare are all common in the area. The area is favored by hunters and is crossed by the North Country National Scenic trail.

When the US Forest Service conducted its second nation-wide inventory of roadless areas in 1979 (RARE II), the Cascade Plains Roadless Area encompassed 7,684 acres of the Ottawa National Forest. The Forest Service recommended at that time that the area not be given Wilderness protection, but to instead put the area into “multiple-use” management. The agency immediately opened the area to logging and road construction.

As a result of logging and the construction of logging roads in the area, 3,472 acres were eliminated from the Cascade Roadless area. In the Ottawa National Forest’s most recent roadless inventory in 2002, the size of the area was down to 4,212 roadless acres, disqualifying it from roadless protection. The smaller area has been area renamed “Norwich Plains” by the Forest Service. Protection for the original Cascade Roadless Area and the adjacent Trap Hills is currently being sought by the Trap Hills Conservation Alliance.

**CASCADE/
NORWICH
PLAINS
FORMER
ROADLESS
AREA
-
OTTAWA
NATIONAL
FOREST
-
MICHIGAN
-
LOGGED**

HUNGRY RUN ROADLESS AREA



Overview of Forests and Forest Service Clearcuts in the Hungry Run Roadless Area
Photos by David Zaber

Nearly half of the Chequamegon National Forest's 7,363 acre Hungry Run Roadless Area is made up of wetlands containing many rare and unique ecological features. The Bear Lake area, for example, contains a large tract of mature hardwood forest with pockets of old growth hemlock, and large beds of wild rice heavily utilized by nesting bald eagles, common loons, black ducks, and river otter. There is also a large black spruce-tamarack bog with hemlock and pine islands which support a small population of the rare spruce grouse. The Hungry Run Roadless Area also falls within the territory of the Brunet River wolf pack. Both the eastern timber wolf and the bald eagle are federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species (TES). American pine marten, listed as endangered by the State of Wisconsin, is also believed to live within this roadless area.

There are 12.1 miles of perennial streams and rivers within the Hungry Run Roadless Area, including several small warm water creeks and the East Fork of the Chippewa River. The river is one of the finest smallmouth bass rivers in northern Wisconsin and supports a rich fishery of as many as 26 other species, including lake sturgeon, various species of redhorse, darters, dace, shiners, walleye, northern pike, and musky.

Prior to the enactment of the Roadless Rule, the Hungry Run Roadless Area was subjected to intensive clearcutting by the Forest Service, and like all of the Roadless Areas in Wisconsin, only the rule protects it from further degradation. If the rule is reversed, the entire area would be opened to logging and road construction under the Forest Service's existing plan for the forest.

**HUNGRY RUN
ROADLESS
AREA**

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**CHEQUAMEGON
NATIONAL
FOREST**

-

WISCONSIN

-

**LOGGED
THREATENED**

IRON RIVER ROADLESS AREA



Overflight photo of the Iron River Roadless Area
Photo by David Zaber

More than fifteen miles of streams and rivers wind their way through the Chequamegon National Forest's 8,331 acre Iron River Roadless Area, creating a large core of solitude with a feeling of isolation, independence, closeness to nature and tranquility. The area includes mature black ash stands, intermittent stream segments, numerous ephemeral ponds, and the "Iron River Hardwoods" with several stands of old growth hemlock-hardwood forest with super-canopy white pine and spruce.

Two packs of timber wolf use the area as a part of their territory. The Dingdong Creek wolf pack uses the western end, and the Brush Creek wolf pack uses the eastern half. Pine marten, listed as endangered by the State of Wisconsin, may also be found within the Iron River Roadless Area. The area provides high-quality opportunities for hunting deer, bear and ruffed grouse.

While a total of 119 acres has been clearcut during the past 10 years, overall, the area remains natural in appearance, with few signs of recent disturbance.

Like all of the roadless areas in Wisconsin, the Iron River Roadless Area is currently protected only by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If the rule is reversed, the entire area would be opened to logging and road construction under the Forest Service's existing plan for the forest.

IRON RIVER
ROADLESS
AREA
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CHEQUAMEGON
NATIONAL
FOREST
-
WISCONSIN
-
THREATENED

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.

There are 147,000 acres of roadless areas in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin's National Forests. If the Roadless Area Conservation Rule is reversed by the Bush administration, those areas will be opened to logging and road-building. These last intact roadless forests make up only two percent of the national forests in these three states, and less than six tenths of a percent of the region's available timber.

This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin's National Forests 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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