

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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Hinchey Blasts Bush Administrations' Repeal Of "Roadless Rule" For National Forests

58.5 Million Acres of Undeveloped National Forest Land Endangered

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) blasted the Bush Administration's decision today to repeal a federal rule that prohibited roads from being built in national forest areas. Hinchey was a leader in the effort to create the "Roadless Area Conservation Rule," which sought to protect the last remaining 58.5 million acres of roadless national forest land from development.

"This is a sad day for those of us who care deeply about protecting our nation's forests," Hinchey said. "The Bush Administration is turning back the clock on environmental protection. With this new rule, the 58.5 million acres of roadless national forest land currently remaining have lost their protection from the federal government. This Administration will stop at nothing to find ways to enable the destruction of the environment."

Initiated during the Clinton Administration, the roadless rule was finalized in January 2001, after three years of scientific review. Several lawsuits were filed against the rule, which prompted the Bush Administration to suggest that the rule be repealed and replaced with a voluntary process. Today, the Bush Administration announced a final rule change that creates a voluntary conservation process whereby individual governors can petition the federal government to manage roadless areas in various ways. This opens up the potential for road development in currently undeveloped portions of national forest land.

Hinchey led the fight to prevent road construction and logging in the nearly 58.5 million acres of roadless U.S. Forest Service land. In June 1999, he generated a letter that was signed by 168 members of the House of Representatives urging President Clinton to protect roadless areas within the National Forests. Hinchey subsequently fought for improvements to the administration's draft proposal that were eventually included in the final plan, including the immediate protection of the Tongass National Forest.

"With so much sprawl and development throughout our country, it's imperative that we save the precious remaining acres of roadless national forest and spare them from development of any kind," Hinchey said. "This new rule that the Bush Administration has instituted today should motivate all Americans to fight back and demand that new federal protections are instituted immediately to safeguard our national forests. I will continue to work relentlessly in the House to fight this and other attempts to destroy the environment."

Nearly 2 million Americans submitted comments in favor of the Roadless Rule during the public comment period. The nation's leading scientists have repeatedly stated that the roadless portions of our national forests are not only the most important habitat for fish and wildlife, but are critical sources of clean drinking water for more than 60 million Americans. Despite the rule's popular support and sound scientific basis, the Bush Administration has consistently worked to weaken and undermine the rule. Today, they effectively killed it.

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