



FORESTS FOREVER

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Bring Back the Roadless Area Conservation Rule! *Roadless Repeal challenged in court*

San Francisco, CA: Forests Forever Foundation has joined with 19 other conservation groups and the States of California, Oregon, and New Mexico today in calling for protection of the last wild places in North America.

The 20 conservation groups filed a lawsuit in federal district court in San Francisco seeking to invalidate a Bush administration decision targeting the last, large untouched tracts of our national forests for industrial development. The suit asks the court to reinstate a prior rule that protected these key areas.

“The importance of roadless forests is impossible to overstate,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever in San Francisco, California. “Much of California’s clean drinking water comes from watersheds in roadless areas. Unroaded forests provide a refuge for wild plants and animals. And roadless forests are some of the last places for Americans to experience wild, untouched nature.”

The original Roadless Area Conservation Rule protected 58.5 million roadless acres of national forest from roadbuilding, logging, drilling, mining, and other development. The roadless rule was one of the most popular environmental rules ever written. More than 1.2 million Americans commented on the rule after it was first proposed in 1998, more than 95 percent of them supporting its ban on new roadbuilding in public forests.

Despite its valuable protections, the 2001 Roadless Rule was formally repealed by the Bush administration in May of 2005.

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“Quite apart from their inestimable spiritual value as wild forests,” Hughes said, “roadless areas are worth a tremendous amount to the California economy for the ecosystem services they provide, such as clean air and water, and for the recreational opportunities they afford. It would be a tragic mistake to trade all this for a tiny amount of revenue from logging, mining, or development.”

There are already 386,000 miles of roads on our national forests— enough to encircle the globe 15 times. Thousands of miles of these roads have fallen into disrepair and are sending sediment into many of our watersheds, causing significant stream damage and water pollution.

“We can’t afford to maintain the roads that already exist in national forests,” Hughes said. “The Forest Service has a \$10 billion backlog of road repairs. We don’t need any more roads in our public forests.”

The Roadless Repeal also gives state governors the right to petition the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Forest Service, for particular roadless area protections, though the petitions may or may not be granted. Many governors have objected to this process because it would be cumbersome and costly.

“The Bush repeal puts the burden on state governors to petition to protect lands that had already been protected,” Hughes said. “But even that is a fake. The final decision as to whether a forest will remain roadless or not rests with the Secretary of Agriculture, a political appointee. We need to have our public forests returned to their real owners— the American people.”

“The original roadless rule did it best,” Hughes said. “All roadless areas should be protected from logging and development.”

The lawsuit was filed by Earthjustice on behalf of The Wilderness Society, California Wilderness Coalition, Forests Forever Foundation, Northcoast Environmental Center, Oregon Natural Resources Fund, Sitka Conservation Society, Siskiyou Regional Education Project, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Center for Biological Diversity, Environmental Protection Information Center, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Defenders of Wildlife, Pacific Rivers Council, Idaho Conservation League, Conservation NW, and Greenpeace. The Attorneys General of California and New Mexico and the Governor of Oregon filed a lawsuit challenging the Roadless Repeal on August 30, 2005.

For more information on the Roadless Rule and its repeal, please visit www.earthjustice.org/campaign/display.html?ID=4.