

AMERICAN FORESTS' Response to the Administration's Decision to Overturn the Roadless Area Conservation Rule

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AMERICAN FORESTS is concerned about the Bush Administration's proposal to overturn the Roadless Area Conservation Rule approved by the Clinton Administration in 2001. The new proposal suggests a process that would give authority to the nation's governors to develop state-specific proposals for roadless areas. We are concerned, first, about giving too much authority to states for proposed actions on our national forests -- federal lands that are managed to serve the national interest. Second, we are concerned that state governments would have difficulty developing proposals that would both protect roadless areas and meet local needs. Finally, we are particularly concerned that if states do not offer their own proposals, the Bush Administration proposal would revert to the level of roadless area protection in existing national forest plans. This would allow development of 24 million of the 58 million acres set down as roadless in the 2001 rule.

AMERICAN FORESTS has developed an "Ecosystem and Restoration Maintenance" policy agenda. This program works to change the focus of forest management from an extraction-based approach to a restoration-oriented process. Such a process, if carried out in an open and inclusive way, allows for a long-term investment in restoration and maintenance of healthy ecosystems and communities while also securing ecosystem services provided by trees and forests. This investment builds the capacity of urban and rural communities to carry out restoration work and gives local people a stake in the wellbeing of their surrounding environment. The involvement of local interested parties in the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes on federal lands often results in the development of innovative outcomes in which learning and trust increase.

AMERICAN FORESTS would encourage the Forest Service to invest resources in the restoration of the developed landscape rather than taking on a larger undertaking by further developing currently roadless lands. This endeavor should progress collaboratively and with an emphasis on learning and on building trust. The inclusion of these principles will reduce the conflict that has surrounded national forest issues for the past two decades.

AMERICAN FORESTS has supported proposals for increased protection of roadless areas in our national forests since January 1998, when former U.S. Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck first announced a moratorium on roadbuilding in roadless areas, a move that led to the Roadless Rule of 2001. We believe that roadless areas need greater protection because they provide significant ecological services including climate regulation; clean air and water; and critical fish, wildlife, and plant habitat. We have expressed concern about how the 2001 Roadless Rule might affect some communities and would like to see the Forest Service work collaboratively to address local issues, such as wildfire threats and watershed protection.