

Dale Bosworth
Chief, US Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

March 13, 2006

Dear Chief Bosworth,

We are a coalition of conservationists, hunters, anglers, backpackers, hikers, bird watchers, religious leaders, scientists, and others who are writing to you concerning the future of Arizona's last wild forests. These last roadless forests provide tremendous benefits to the citizens of Arizona, as well as to all Americans who share ownership of these national treasures.

The federal roadless areas of our state provide our citizens with rich scenic and recreational opportunities and serve as an essential part of the economic foundation of our state. The citizens of Arizona have repeatedly voiced their support for strong protection for these National Forest lands.

On May 5, 2005, the Department of Agriculture announced the adoption of a final rule requiring Governors to file petitions with the Forest Service in order to receive protections for roadless areas within their states above those afforded by the forest planning process.

According to the Rule, any such petition must be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture not later than November 13, 2006. After the petition is submitted, it will be reviewed by a National Advisory Committee that will provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary on any subsequent State-specific rulemakings within 90 days.

If the petition is accepted, the Forest Service shall be directed to initiate notice and comment for a statewide rulemaking to address the petition.

According to a statement by Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns concurrent with the issuance of the Rule, the rule would, "advance President Bush's commitment to cooperatively conserve inventoried roadless areas within our national forests."

Similarly, on September 6, 2005, Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey stated, "we are providing interim protection to roadless areas, pending the development of state specific rules provided for in our 2005 rulemaking."

On February 9, the Governor of Washington joined California, Oregon and New Mexico in challenging the legality of the repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule. That suit has been joined in Amicus filings by the states of Maine and Montana. The Rule has also been challenged in court by 20 conservation organizations.

On February 28th of this year, over a quarter of a million American's petitioned the Department of Agriculture pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act to reinstate the 2001 rule. The act requires a prompt determination by the agency.

In light of legal cloud surrounding the new rule, the unprecedented petition for reinstatement, and consistent with the administration's stated intent to "cooperatively conserve inventoried roadless areas within our national forests" and provide "interim protection to roadless areas, pending the development of state specific rules" we ask the Forest Service to agree not to propose projects in inventoried roadless areas that might disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection, or degrade their special roadless qualities, and to halt and withdraw all such projects under development until the disposition of these areas has been resolved.

Governor Napolitano has publicly indicated that she will petition for restoring roadless protection in Arizona. She is currently working with the United States Forest Service to organize and schedule a process whereby the ideas and opinions of the general public, affected local communities, and wildlife managers can be evaluated. Given this, it would seem inappropriate for the Forest Service to approve or conduct projects in Inventoried Roadless Areas or to restrict the boundaries of those areas until the Governor has completed this process.

The roadless areas of our National Forests provide Arizona's citizens not only rich scenic and recreational opportunities, but also serve as a part of the economic foundation of our state. Decisions regarding the management of these lands as roadless areas must be afforded significant consideration and weight. Moreover, decisions to take actions which may disqualify areas or portions of areas from protection, or degrade their roadless qualities and values should not be made while the state is reviewing its options for the conservation of these areas per the request of the Department of Agriculture.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

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