

February 15, 2018

Senators/Representative
Washington D.C.

RE: Local Support for Inventoried Roadless Area Protections in California

Dear Senator/Representative:

We are writing to express our strong support for protecting our national forest roadless areas -- incredible landscapes like the Rincon Roadless Area in the Sequoia National Forest, North Fork American Roadless Area in the Tahoe National Forest, North Fork Smith Roadless Area on the Six Rivers National Forest and the Mono-Alamar Roadless Area in the Los Padres National Forest. Over the last year, local and national threats have emerged undercutting protections for roadless areas.

In California, a diverse and strong coalition of conservation, recreation, wildlife, faith-based and local economic and political leaders have recognized the values of 4.4 million acres of national forest roadless areas statewide. These unroaded, unlogged, old-growth, high-functioning ecosystems account for just 21% of the more than 20 million acres of national forests in California.

Between 1999 and 2001, the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule was established as part of one of the largest rulemakings in the history of the federal government. The Forest Service held more than 600 public meetings nationwide, including more than 42 in California. More than 1.6 million Americans submitted comments during the draft rule comment period, including more than 140,000 comments from California citizens during the draft rule comment period. During that period, Californians overwhelmingly supported protection of inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). Over 95% of the comments submitted supported protecting roadless areas.

The 2001 Roadless Rule outlined common sense balanced protections that are appropriate for managing California's roadless forests. At its heart, it is focused on prohibiting new road construction in areas of our national forests that remain unroaded. The rule does not close existing roads or trails or change current access for hikers, cyclists, campers and other recreational users. The policy also has common sense provisions allowing for emergency road building to protect public health and safety during natural disasters.

Nationwide, the Rule preserves crucial habitat for more than 1,500 species of fish and wildlife, including many threatened and endangered species while also safeguarding the source of clean and safe drinking water for millions of Americans. Roadless areas protect the headwaters and source of municipal drinking water supplies for many communities around the state, including Redding, Sacramento, Eureka, Fresno, Bakersfield and San Diego.

The Rule also maintains current public access and recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, horseback riding, climbing, hunting and fishing. Roadless areas provide world class recreation opportunities as well as family accessible outings that fuel local economies.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, 56% of California residents participate in outdoor recreation each year, generating \$92 billion in consumer spending and more than 691,000 jobs.¹

Many of our organizations spent years defending the Roadless Rule from an administrative effort to weaken and eliminate roadless protections throughout the West in the 2000's. Through grassroots advocacy and citizen mobilization, that effort was met with the same broad and deep support for these pristine landscapes as was evident in the original rulemaking. For nearly two decades the Roadless Rule has protected the conservation, recreation and wildlife values that play such a large role in the quality of life we all enjoy here in California.

However, over the last year we have become increasingly concerned about legislative provisions and administrative proposals that would violate or threaten roadless forests.

Nationally, the current Senate appropriations bill for fiscal year 2018 includes a rider that would exempt the Tongass and Chugach National Forest in Alaska from the Roadless Rule. Both the nature of this rider and the direct attack on roadless forest is of great concern. Furthermore, the House of Representatives on November 1 passed the "Resilient Federal Forests Act," which would exempt many Forest Service logging projects from the Roadless Rule.

Please vote against any legislative efforts to weaken or eliminate roadless forest protection under the 2001 Roadless Rule, including the Alaska-based Tongass National Forest and roadless area riders to the FY 2018 Appropriations bill. Additionally, please speak out against any administrative efforts to weaken or eliminate roadless area protections. Current and future generations of California residents will thank you.

Sincerely,

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¹ <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/california-outdoor-recreation-economy-report/>

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