

Background on the Roadless Rule

In 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was adopted with massive public support to protect 58.5 million acres of roadless national forest land in 39 states. The Roadless Rule resulted from years of work and public input. The public comment period set a record with 1.6 million public comments submitted. The rule protects 58.5 million acres of national forests over 39 states from new road construction, and prohibits the logging of roadless areas in the National Forest System.

What's at Stake: The proposed rollback and elimination of the 2001 Roadless Rule jeopardizes nearly 45 million acres of undeveloped backcountry forestland managed by the U.S. Forest Service, comprising around a third of the territory in our national forest system. These forests have only remained intact because of the Forest Service's nearly 25-year-old commitment not to build roads in these areas for harmful activities like major logging operations or oil-and-gas drilling.

Priority Talking Points

- **Vital Habitat for Imperiled Species:** The lands in question include lower-elevation forests, wetlands, canyons, and other undeveloped lands that are critical to our nation's ecological health. Because they are not fragmented by roads, these Roadless Areas provide habitat for many imperiled species such as California condors, grizzly bears and wolves in the Yellowstone area, native salmon and trout in the Pacific Northwest, migratory songbirds and bobcats in the Midwest, and Appalachian hardwoods. They also sustain wild salmon, especially in Alaska, where they are the lifeblood for both the fishing industry and traditional subsistence practices of Indigenous communities.
- **Vital for America's Drinking Water:** The US National Forests are the headwaters of our great rivers and [the largest source of municipal water supply in the nation](#), serving over 60 million people in 3,400 communities in 33 states. Roads are a major cause of water pollution. Because it protects these headwaters, the 2001 Roadless Rule is vital for maintaining clean drinking water for communities across the country. Major U.S. cities including Los Angeles, Portland, Denver, and Atlanta receive a significant portion of their water supply from national forests.

Additional talking points

- **Recreation Spots at Risk:** Since 2001, protected roadless areas have offered abundant outdoor recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, camping or

other activities. Every year, millions of people take advantage of the free (or extremely affordable) access to these public lands. According to maps from Outdoor Alliance's GIS Lab, roadless areas protect 11,337 climbing routes and boulder problems, more than 1,000 whitewater paddling runs, 43,826 miles of trail, and 20,298 mountain biking trails. Large sections of the Continental Divide, Pacific Crest, and Appalachian National Trails traverse protected roadless areas.

- **Taxpayers on the Hook:** Building more roads in national forests would be a drain on taxpayers. Even with the Roadless Rule in place, the Forest Service [already has a 370,000-mile road system](#) – twice as long as the nation's highway system – crisscrossing national forests. This forest road infrastructure is already so big that the Forest Service can't afford to properly maintain it, triggering a maintenance backlog that has ballooned to billions in needed repairs. Taxpayers have subsidized this already unwieldy road network and would be stuck footing the bill for any new roads built in backcountry forest areas following this rollback.
- **Subsistence and Cultural Values at Risk:** Increased industrial activity in roadless areas would also jeopardize culturally-important sites and subsistence use areas. These spaces are critical to food security for many indigenous communities as well as for sustaining cultural practices, including hunting, fishing, and gathering forest plants for food, medicine, and traditional arts.
- **Important for Protecting Migration Corridors and Game Habitat:** Roads fragment habitat and degrade migration corridors that game species like elk and mule deer rely on. Protected roadless areas help ensure these migratory game corridors remain intact and protected from roads and the industrial development roads enable.
- **Millions Support the Roadless Rule:** The Roadless Rule is a highly popular policy that is often celebrated as one of America's most successful conservation measures. Prior to its enactment, more than 600 public hearings were held nationwide, and 1.6 million Americans weighed in to call for protection of these forestlands. More recently, more than 45 members of the House and Senate have signed onto legislation that would codify the Roadless Rule so that in the future, it could not be rolled back without an act of Congress.
- **Rollback Paves the Way for Logging:** The real reason a rollback of the Roadless Rule is being proposed is to re-open these forests to logging and other industrial development. This proposal follows on the heels of other administrative actions

that have called for a dramatic increase in logging and oil and gas drilling on federal lands. An increase in these industrial activities would worsen climate change, destroy recreation areas, put the lands at greater risk of wildfire, destroy wildlife habitat, and threaten drinking water sources. Benefits are lost if trees are removed. Further, logging and logging roads can have devastating impacts to drinking water quality and fish habitat. The cost will fall to communities, who will face threats to their supply of clean water and will need to clean up polluted water before sending it to households and local economies – and will suffer from the damage to commercial and recreational fisheries.

- **Policy Has Built-In Exceptions:** The Roadless Rule is extremely flexible and allows for necessary forest management and the construction of roads as needed to address fires, floods, or other catastrophic events, and other circumstances like the need to connect communities. National forest managers routinely conduct forest stewardship activities within roadless areas such as prescribed burning and wildlife habitat improvement activities.
- **As Bad as the Public Lands Selloff:** Anyone who loves our public lands should be concerned about attempts to reverse the Roadless Rule. First there was an attempt to sell off public lands, proposed by politicians out of touch with the values of everyday Americans. Now, this administration wants to sell out our nation's public forests by opening remote, protected areas to logging, roadbuilding and other development. This idea is just as bad as the sell-off that they tried, but failed, to pull off.
- **Not a Partisan Issue:** It doesn't matter if you're a Democrat, or a Republican, or if you have \$10 or \$1 million in your bank account. You've got the right to explore tens of millions of acres of pristine backcountry lands where there are no roads, only open land, clean water and peace of mind. These lands are universally enjoyed and they belong to everyone – not wealthy corporations trying to turn a profit.

Colorado and Idaho

- **Colorado and Idaho May Still be At Risk:** The CO and ID rules are not currently on the chopping block. Our hope is that these rules will be left alone but the Forest Service could come after them at a later date
- **No Less Concern in CO and ID:** Coloradans and Idahoans have no less of a reason to oppose this rollback, even if their roadless areas will retain status quo protections – because these are national public lands that belong to all Americans.

And of course, people living in these places may regularly cross state lines to enjoy the beauty of national forests in different locales.

Wildfire and Roadless

- **For in-depth questions about fire**, reporters should talk with Dr. Alexandra Syphard (fire scientist), Tim Ingalsbee (firefighter), and Bill Avey (firefighter, retired USFS). Contact Josh Hicks joshh@twos.org and Emily Denny edenny@twos.org about connecting the expert with the reporter.
- **More roads will result in more fire ignitions.** According to the U.S. Forest Service [9 out of 10](#) wildfires are caused by people. New [peer-reviewed research](#) found that fires are four times more likely to start near a road than in roadless forests. That's because more roads also means more people throwing cigarettes out car windows, leaving campfires unattended, and hot metal/sparks from vehicles igniting dry grasses. Opening intact backcountry forests to new roads is not a wildfire solution. It increases the likelihood of human-caused ignitions and stretches already [limited firefighting capacity](#) even further.
- **If the Administration was serious about addressing the wildfire crisis, why would it dismantle the U.S. Forest Service?** The Trump Administration has already reduced the [U.S. Forest Service workforce by 15%](#), and many of these staff played a role in wildfire mitigation and response. To boot, the Administration is withholding hundreds of millions of dollars in hazardous fuels mitigation funding to partners, as detailed in the [Washington Post](#) and [Politico](#). Americans' lives are already at risk with reckless cuts and divestment in the Forest Service's fire program by the Administration. Let's not exacerbate the problem by stretching limited firefighting capacity even further by increasing the likelihood of human-caused ignitions.
- **Hazardous fuels treatments are already allowed.** The 2001 Roadless Rule permits hazardous fuels reduction — it only bars new road construction and industrial logging. [According to the Forest Service's own research](#), 34% of all fuel treatment activities between 2001–2019 occurred in roadless areas.