

PROTECTING OUR OLDEST FORESTS

BACKGROUND

Hailed as one of America's most successful conservation measures, the **Roadless Area Conservation Rule** protects drinking water, wildlife habitat, and world-class recreation opportunities across 58.5 million acres of national forests.



WHAT DOES IT PROTECT?

- Roadless areas in our national forests by **restricting logging and road construction**, with some exceptions.
- Pristine and ecologically-intact US Forest Service land in **38 states** across the country.
- In Alaska's Tongass National Forest alone, **9.3 million acres** are protected by the rule
- **Drinking water for millions:** Roadless areas include all or part of 354 municipal watersheds.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

In June 2025, Trump moved to revoke the Roadless Rule—a decision that would threaten critical wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, old forests, and the outdoor spaces that millions of people rely on. The Sierra Club is fighting to retain these invaluable forests - and the policies that protect them - across the country. **Learn more: sc.org/forests.**

ECOLOGICAL VALUE

- National forests provide **drinking water** for over 60 million Americans.
- Roadless areas protect **habitat for fish** especially threatened and endangered species—loss of which may impact Tribal treaty rights.
- They provide habitat for over **1,600** threatened or endangered plants and animals, including the grizzly bear and Canada lynx.

MORE ROADS = MORE FIRES

Some argue that weakening the Roadless Rule will reduce wildfires, but the facts say otherwise.

- New research from The Wilderness Society (now in peer review) shows that from 1992-2024, wildfires were **four times more likely** to start in roaded areas than in roadless forest tracts.
- Another study by the Pacific Biodiversity Institute showed that over 90% of wildfires occurred within **half a mile of a road**.



DID YOU KNOW?

If you've spent time hiking, biking, fishing, or exploring our national forests, chances are that you've been in a protected roadless area!

- These areas provide scenic backdrops for **iconic trails** like the Continental Divide Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, and Appalachian Trail.
- Popular trails to mountain peaks, waterfalls, canyon bottoms, and fishing holes often pass through roadless areas.
- They provide some of the country's best big game and cold-water fish habitat.
- Mountain bikers frequently ride through protected roadless areas.

WIDE SUPPORT—THEN & NOW

The Roadless Rule has been widely supported by many stakeholders, including the outdoor recreation industry, recreationists, hunters and anglers, scientists, conservations, economists, state game and fish agencies, and elected officials.

When the Forest Service developed the Rule in 1999, it conducted the most **extensive public participation** in federal rulemaking history. The Forest Service held over 600 public meetings across the country. And more than 1.6 million people submitted comments— **95% of them** supporting strong roadless area protection.

WHAT ABOUT THE ECONOMICS?

Some claim there's an untapped timber market in roadless areas—but that's not true.

- Most of the easily-accessed forest was cut down **decades ago**.
- Roadless areas are hard to reach, and there is a reason they were not logged during the timber boom of the late 1900s.

Meanwhile:

- For decades, the Forest Service has **struggled** to maintain 370,000 miles of existing roads in national forests. And it's no wonder: that is twice the amount of roads managed by the Federal Highway Administration.
- The Roadless Rule saves **millions in taxpayer dollars each year** by avoiding costly road subsidies—especially in places like the Tongass, where roads can cost \$160,000 to \$500,000 per mile due to rugged terrain.
- National forests are a vital part of our public lands system, which helps support a **\$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy** and sustains **5 million** US jobs (Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, 2023).

