

Roadless Rule Rollback - Talking Points

- **What's at Stake:** The proposed rollback of the 2001 Roadless Rule jeopardizes nearly 45 million acres of the nearly 60 million acres of inventoried roadless areas within the National Forest System. These forests today remain intact thanks to the Rule's nearly 25-year-old policy against road building and authorization of commercial logging operations in Inventoried Roadless Areas, thereby protecting their wild character and ecological integrity. There are approximately 1.6 million acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas in New Mexico, and area equivalent in size to the entirety of the Santa Fe National Forest.
- ✎ **More Roads Means More Wildfires:** Proponents of rolling back the Roadless Rule have disingenuously suggested that removing protections from wild tracts of our national forests is somehow needed to reduce the risk of wildfire. However, this purported "solution" will only lead to more wildfires. New [research](#) from The Wilderness Society, now in peer review, shows that from 1992-2024, wildfires were four times as likely to start in areas with roads than in roadless forest tracts. Another [study](#) showed that more than 90 percent of wildfires occurred within half a mile of a road. Furthermore, the Roadless Rule explicitly allows the Forest Service to implement treatments to reduce hazardous fuels within Inventoried Roadless Areas.
- **Vital for America's Drinking Water:** National Forests encompass the headwaters of many of our great rivers and are [the largest single contributor of municipal water supplies in the nation](#), providing drinking water to over 60 million people in 3,400 communities in 33 states. Roads are a major contributor to degradation of water quality due to erosion and sedimentation issues and because they act as vectors for contamination by other water pollutants. Because it protects vital headwaters areas, the 2001 Roadless Rule is essential in maintaining clean, reliable drinking water supplies 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.
- **Recreation Spots at Risk:** Inventoried Roadless Areas provide an outstanding setting for recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, and more. Every year, millions of people take advantage of the free (or extremely affordable) access to these public lands, [which protect](#) 9,298 miles of hiking trails, 7,947 miles of mountain biking trails, and 691 miles of backcountry ski trails (17,936 miles of non-motorized trails in total), as well as at least 5,567 rock climbing routes and 556 river miles popular for paddling. Large segments of the internationally renowned Continental Divide, Pacific Crest, and Appalachian National Scenic Trails traverse Inventoried Roadless Areas.

- **Vital Habitat for Imperiled Species:** Inventoried Roadless Areas include numerous forest types, wetlands, canyons, and other undeveloped lands and ecosystems that are critical to our nation's ecological health. Because they are not fragmented by roads, these areas protect habitat for many imperiled species such as Mexican gray wolves in the Southwest, grizzly bears and wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, anadromous fish in the Pacific Northwest, migratory songbirds in the Appalachian hardwoods, and more. They also protect critical wild salmon spawning grounds, all along the West Coast but especially in Alaska where they are the lifeblood for both the fishing industry and traditional subsistence practices of Indigenous communities.
- **Roadless 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, mining, and oil and gas drilling on federal lands. An increase in industrial extractive activities would worsen climate change, destroy recreation areas, increase the risk of wildfire, destroy wildlife habitat, and threaten drinking water sources. Commercial logging targets larger, older trees, which play an outsize role in supporting biodiversity, sequestering carbon dioxide, and shading streams to the benefits of aquatic species— yet these benefits are lost when large trees are removed from the landscape. Further, logging and logging roads can have devastating impacts to water quality and fish habitat. These impacts from degraded water quality fall on downstream agricultural users and communities, not to mention aquatic species.
- ✶ **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 380,000-mile road system](#) – eight times the size the nation's Interstate Highway System – crisscrossing national forests. This road infrastructure is already so big that the Forest Service can't afford to properly maintain it, resulting in 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. Unmaintained roads are not only a primary contributor to water quality issues but can also become impassible, reducing public access to our public lands.
- **Subsistence and Cultural Values at Risk:** Increased industrial extraction in Inventoried 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 migration corridors that game species like elk and mule deer rely on. Inventoried Roadless Areas help ensure these migratory corridors remain intact and protected from roads and the industrial development that roads enable.
- **Millions Support the Roadless Rule:** The Roadless Rule is a highly popular policy that while relatively unknown, is often celebrated as one of America's most successful conservation measures. Prior to its enactment, more than 600 public hearings and listening sessions were held nationwide, and 1.6 million Americans weighed in to call for protection of these forestlands. More recently, about 70 members of the House and Senate have co-sponsored legislation that would codify the Roadless Rule so that in the future, it could not be rolled back without an act of Congress.
- **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 emergencies like fires, floods, or other catastrophic events, and other circumstances like the need to connect communities. The Forest Service routinely conducts forest stewardship activities within roadless areas such as thinning, prescribed burning, and wildlife habitat improvement activities.