

October 6, 2026

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Joshua White, Acting Director
Ecosystem Management Coordination

Brooke Rollins, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture

Tom Schultz, Chief
United States Forest Service

Dear Acting Director White, Secretary Rollins, and Chief Schultz,

On behalf of 232 legislators across 41 states, we write in staunch support of the U.S. Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule (the "Roadless Rule") and firmly oppose the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to rescind this popular and highly successful conservation policy.

As a bipartisan group of elected officials representing a diverse range of stakeholders, communities, and conservationists alike, we urge the USDA to: (1) halt the rescission of the Roadless Rule, (2) extend the comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and (3) reorient agency efforts toward the Rule's continued, effective implementation. We urge these actions for the following reasons:

1. The Roadless Rule has broad public support, and the opportunity for public input has been severely constrained under the current proposal.

The Roadless Rule was established in 2001 through one of the most robust public processes in federal rulemaking history — generating [1.6 million public comments](#), with the [vast majority](#) in support, alongside hundreds of public meetings. In contrast, the current rescission effort reflects a severely limited public process. The Forest Service provided just 21 days for comment during the Notice of Intent (NOI) phase and has not held public meetings. Despite this, more than 600,000 comments were submitted, with over [99% opposing rescission](#) during the NOI. The current comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, at 33 days, is similarly insufficient and should be extended to ensure meaningful public participation.

2. The Roadless Rule has been critical for protecting important landscapes across numerous states and regions.

Since its inception, the Rule has safeguarded [nearly 60 million acres](#) of National Forest System lands [across 37 states](#). These lands provide clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and outdoor recreation opportunities for communities nationwide, including in the

Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, and the George Washington National Forest in Virginia.

3. The Roadless Rule provides vast ecological benefits, helping improve water quality, safeguard wildlife habitat, and address climate change.

The Roadless Rule's enduring support reflects its proven benefits. By limiting road construction, logging, and mining in undeveloped areas, the Rule has protected watershed health and water quality. Forest Service data show that [watersheds in roadless areas](#) are far more likely to be in properly functioning condition, directly supporting clean drinking water and resilient ecosystems. These lands also provide [essential habitat for wildlife](#), including hundreds of species listed under the Endangered Species Act, such as grizzly bears, lynx, and marten. In addition, roadless areas play a critical role in addressing climate change; the Tongass National Forest alone stores more than [1.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent](#) and continues to sequester millions of metric tons annually.

4. Wildfire resilience is already meaningfully addressed in the Roadless Rule, and claims about heightened wildfire risks in Roadless Areas are not justified.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement does not justify claims that rescinding the Roadless Rule would improve wildfire management. The Rule already allows for hazardous fuels reduction, and nearly [2 million acres of roadless areas](#) have been treated to reduce fire risk. Research shows that [wildfire risk is approximately equal inside and outside of roadless areas](#), while ignitions are significantly more likely near roads, with studies finding that fires are nearly four times more likely to start in these areas.

5. Roadless Areas enhance the outdoor recreation economy, reduce Forest Service maintenance backlogs, and hold deep importance for Indigenous communities.

Roadless areas support a strong outdoor recreation economy, providing opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other activities that contribute to a [\\$1.2 trillion industry supporting millions of jobs](#). At the same time, the Rule helps avoid costly road construction and maintenance. The Forest Service already faces a [multibillion-dollar maintenance backlog](#), and expanding road networks into remote areas would increase costs for taxpayers.

These landscapes also hold deep cultural and subsistence importance for Indigenous communities, supporting traditional practices and ways of life. The proposed rescission threatens these values and has [drawn opposition from Tribal leaders and organizations](#).

Closing: Maintain the Integrity of the Roadless Rule

In summary, the Roadless Rule is popular, effective, and essential to responsible forest stewardship. The Rule supports strong outdoor economies, water security, wildlife habitats, cultural heritage, and much more. Dismantling a policy with such overwhelming public support, and doing so through a constrained administrative process, undermines both our natural resources and the transparency essential to federal rulemaking. After 25 years of successful implementation, the Roadless Rule should be strengthened, not dismantled.

For these reasons, we urge the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service to halt the proposed rescission of the Roadless Rule and to extend the comment period for the Environmental Impact Statement.

Signed,

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(NC-061)

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(WA-030)

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