

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 23, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

We are writing to express our great concern over your Administration's recent proposal to revoke the landmark 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (2001 Rule). The 2001 Rule ensures that our National Forests will continue to provide clean drinking water for millions of Americans, critical wildlife habitats, and irreplaceable recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, and hiking. We believe that the 2001 Rule is a balanced policy that provides the U.S.D.A. Forest Service with the flexibility needed to conduct hazardous fuels reduction activities to protect forest health and rural communities, as well as build new roads in order to protect public safety within inventoried roadless areas.

In addition, the 2001 Rule was thoroughly vetted and enthusiastically supported by the American people. When developing the 2001 Rule, the Forest Service conducted an extensive public process, including three years of official review and citizen participation, over 600 public meetings, and hearings on each National Forest and in each Forest Service region. To date, the 2001 Rule has garnered over 2.5 million positive comments, more than any other federal rule in history.

Since 2001, support has only grown for the Clinton Administration roadless rule. For example, last January, the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) asked the Forest Service to uphold the 2001 Rule. OIA noted that its solidarity comes from, "understanding that protecting the last one third of our nation's forests is imperative to maintaining the health of recreation destinations, the outdoor recreation industry, and the economies that increasingly depend on them." The Forest Road Working Group, an ad hoc coalition of organizations that collectively represent sportspersons, outdoor recreation businesses, forest products industries, and conservationists, also supports roadless area protections. The Working Group has emphasized that, "roadless areas are national resources that merit a protective national management policy" and recommended that, "the existing Roadless Rule provides an acceptable basis for national management of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and should continue to be implemented."

In 2001, when Attorney General Ashcroft was asked about your Administration's commitment to defending the 2001 Rule during his confirmation hearing, he pledged that, "it would be my responsibility to defend these regulations if and when they are attacked." Secretary of Agriculture Veneman reaffirmed this position when she stated at a May 4, 2001, press conference, "we're here today to announce the Department's decision to uphold the Roadless

Area Conservation Rule.” In reality, since that time, your Administration has failed to defend the 2001 Rule in Federal court and sought to systematically erode its integrity through a series of proposed rulemakings and settlement agreements. Now, your Administration proposes to eliminate the 2001 Rule in its entirety, leaving only Governors with an opportunity to petition for consideration of retaining any of the 2001 Rule’s protections for the National Forest lands in their State.

We also are troubled by the fiscal implications of your Administration’s proposal. In the current climate of growing federal deficits, the taxpayers should not be asked to abandon the large investment they made in the existing rule just to begin a new state-by-state process that could prove considerably more expensive. Nor should they be asked to foot the bill for a proposal that would result in adding to the existing \$10 billion National Forest System road maintenance backlog.


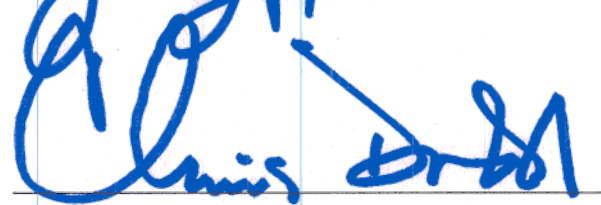
For these reasons we urge you to withdraw your proposal to repeal the 2001 Rule and fulfill the commitments made at the beginning of your Administration to defend the rule and protect these areas for current and future generations of Americans. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to protect America’s National Forest lands.


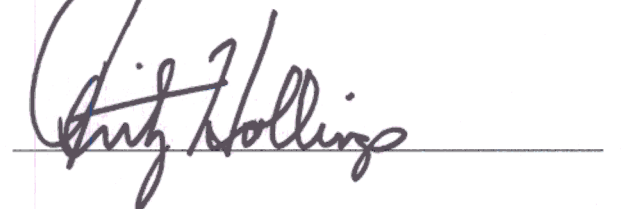
Sincerely,







Patty Murray

Samuel Alaka

Bill Nelson

Robert A. Neuberger

J. Bill

Jack Reed

John

Non Wyden

Frank R. Lautenberg

Charles Schumer

Paul D. Sarbanes

Barbara Boxer

Jim Durkin

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Joe Biden