



FORESTS FOREVER

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Report Details Rollbacks for Idaho Backcountry

The Center for Biological Diversity, Forests Forever, and more than 50 other local and national conservation organizations have released a report detailing the Bush administration's plan to open the door to development in Idaho's roadless backcountry forests— forests currently protected under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Idaho's 9.3 million acres of roadless backcountry make up the core of the last intact forest ecosystem in the lower 48 states— the last place where all of the native plants, fish and wildlife— from the smallest plant to the largest predator— can still be found.

“The loss of Idaho's roadless-area protections would help erode California's protections,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever. “The Bush effort to undo roadless protections state by state should be stopped here and now.”

“We can either leave our last pristine forests as they are, or open the door to mining, logging and other corporate special interests,” said Paul Spitler of the Center for Biological Diversity, “The Bush administration has chosen the latter.”

The report, titled “Wild At Heart,” highlights key differences between the two plans: current management under the protective 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), and the Bush administration's proposed Idaho rule— part of the administration's latest push to undo roadless area protections on a state-by-state basis.

The RACR resulted from the most extensive and popular federal rulemaking process in history and establishes reasonable and nationally-consistent management policies for managing national forest roadless areas.

— more —

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Compared to current management under the RACR, changes under the Bush administration's proposed Idaho rule include:

- Eight times more logging annually;
- A four-fold increase in annual road construction and reconstruction;
- An increase of 545 million tons of phosphate mining; and
- Opening an additional 609,500 acres to other mining, geothermal and oil and gas exploration and development.

The U.S. Forest Service's Draft Environmental Impact Statement predicts the Bush administration's proposed Idaho rule would:

- Diminish natural processes, roadless characteristics, and scenic integrity across 6 million acres (an area the size of Massachusetts);
- Adversely impact hunting and fishing opportunities;
- Negatively affect numerous species and habitats, including 611 sensitive plant populations;
- Increase the spread of noxious weeds across 609,500 acres;
- Compromise the wilderness character of currently pristine forests.

"The ecological, economic and social impacts of changing current management policies would be profound," said Spitler, "which is why the Roadless Area Conservation Rule should remain intact."

Because Idaho is the first state petition analyzed under the administration's new flawed rule, it could set precedent for managing roadless areas in other states. The administration has already proposed similar rollbacks in Alaska and Colorado.

"Every remaining piece of roadless backcountry in our national forest system deserves protection under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule," said Spitler.

The Forest Service will be soliciting comments on the new Idaho rule through April 7th, 2008.

To download a print version of the report, click here.

<http://www.forestsforever.org/WildAtHeartFinalWeb3-7-08.pdf>