



FORESTS FOREVER

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Mike's Gulch roadless logging put on hold

Timber company agrees to delay tree cutting in disputed forest

Silver Creek Logging Co., the Oregon timber company awarded the contract to log Mike's Gulch, inside a national forest roadless area, has agreed to wait until Aug. 4 to begin work on the project.

The timber company's announcement came just prior to a hearing scheduled in U.S. district court in San Francisco on a request for a preliminary injunction to halt the project. The injunction was being sought by the governor of Oregon and a coalition of 20 environmental groups. As a result of the agreement, the request for an injunction will be withdrawn, though it could be reinstated at any time.

"The announcement that logging in Mike's Gulch will not begin until after the roadless lawsuits are heard is great news for Oregon's forests and for roadless areas throughout the country," said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever in San Francisco.

"This delay will allow the lawsuits to restore the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, brought by our coalition and four states, to be heard before the roadless area is entered."

The two lawsuits, one by the states of Oregon, Washington, California and New Mexico, the other by a group of 20 environmental groups (including Forests Forever) ask that the U.S. Forest Service's 2005 repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule be overturned, and the original 2001 rule be restored. A hearing is scheduled in U.S. district court in San Francisco on Aug. 1.

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The 350-acre Mike's Gulch timber sale lies within the South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area in southwest Oregon's Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. It is part of the forest that burned in the immense Biscuit Fire in 2002. Mike's Gulch would be the first timber sale that would cut into a roadless area since the Bush administration repealed the original roadless rule last year.

The Bush administration repealed the original roadless rule in May 2005, replacing it with a regulation that requires governors to petition the U.S. Department of Agriculture in order to protect roadless areas in their states.

The Forest Service went forward with the auction of Mike's Gulch in spite of assurances from undersecretary of agriculture Mark Rey that roadless areas would be protected under an interim rule until states have gone through the new Forest Service petition process required to protect roadless areas.

Oregon Gov. Kulongoski, a Democrat, has begun the petition process to protect the roadless areas in his state. Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, on the other hand, announced in November 2004 that he did not intend to file such a petition.

One of the most popular environmental rules ever, the original roadless rule protected 58.5 million roadless acres of national forest from extractive uses.

By stripping away this protection, the Forest Service placed at risk hundreds of plant, insect, and animal species, threatened drinking-water quality and left forests more vulnerable than before to invasive species, Hughes said.

Forests Forever has campaigned for preserving the protections of the original roadless rule since 2003. California's national forests contain about 4.4 million acres of roadless areas affected by the policy.