



FORESTS FOREVER

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The Roadless Area Conservation Act is back

Bill would permanently protect roadless areas

On May 24, Rep. Jay Inslee (D-WA), joined by a bipartisan group of 140 representatives, re-introduced the Roadless Area Conservation Act (now H.R. 2516) in the U.S. House of Representatives.

A companion bill was re-introduced in the Senate by Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and John Warner (R-VA), along with 16 of their fellow senators.

The bill would codify the provisions of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule as federal law, which could not be changed by executive whim. The Clinton-era rule protected roadless federal land that had not received wilderness designation from roadbuilding, mining, oil and gas drilling, and development.

In addition to protecting roadless areas in the national forests, this bill would restore protection to Alaska's Tongass National Forest, which the Bush administration exempted from the roadless rule in 2005.

Forests Forever has supported the Roadless Area Conservation Act since it was first introduced in 2002, and has worked to protect this country's wild unroaded forests.

In September 2006, Judge Elizabeth Laporte of the U.S. district court in San Francisco ruled that the Forest Service had acted illegally by repealing the original roadless rule without first conducting an environmental review as required by the

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National Environmental Policy Act, and for failing to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, as required by the Endangered Species Act.

“Even though the courts ruled in our favor and restored the original roadless rule, the fight is far from over,” said Paul Hughes, Forests Forever’s executive director. “The Bush administration and the timber industry will continue to do everything they can to overturn the it.”

The original Roadless Area Conservation Rule was the most popular environmental rule ever written, with 4.2 million comments over several public comment periods. The overwhelming majority of these comments (97.9 percent) were in favor of protecting roadless areas.

The loss of its protections for roadless areas would put at risk hundreds of plant, insect, and animal species, threaten water quality and leave forests more vulnerable than before to invasive species.

“We need the roadless rule’s protections codified by an act of Congress, and so do America’s roadless forests,” Hughes said. “Hats off to Rep. Inslee, senators Cantwell and Warner, and all the co-sponsors of this important piece of legislation.”