



FORESTS FOREVER

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Citizens petition Forest Service to reinstate roadless protections *Olympians join effort to end administration's logging and drilling efforts*

WASHINGTON, DC – The Bush administration has been petitioned by more than one-quarter million Americans to reinstate the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and reverse one of the Bush administration's most controversial environmental decisions.

In an unprecedented move, conservationists, concerned Americans and over 100 current and former Olympians employed the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) to petition for a policy reversal. (Local information on petitioners and athletes is available at <http://www.ourforests.org/threats/petition.html>.)

The APA allows citizens to request that the government issue, amend or revoke federal rules. Backers say the unusual step was necessary after the Bush administration failed to account for overwhelming public support for retaining the 2001 rule evidenced during a public comment period drive. Traditionally, citizen participation is limited to comments during rulemakings, but according to conservationists, the comments of 1.7 million Americans were largely ignored by the Bush administration in their repeal of the rule.

“California's roadless areas play a critical role in protecting our waterways, including the Kern River where I trained for the 2004 Summer Olympics,” said Rebecca Giddens, Olympic kayaker and 2004 silver medalist.”

Jon Root, member of the USA Volleyball Team in 1988, said “California is home to some of America's top world-class athletes and most spectacular national forests. I hope Gov. Schwarzenegger sees fit to join our team and take action to ensure our roadless forests remain wild.”

In a letter to the Forest Service, the more than 100 local and national conservation groups who organized the drive demanded a prompt response to the petition as required by law. The groups said the government not only ignored strong public support for the rule, but may have skirted federal environmental law. These legal violations are the subject of two lawsuits in federal court.

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“This petition will remind the Bush administration that people meant what they said when they protested the repeal of the roadless rule. Americans overwhelmingly support retaining the rule, and protecting our last wild, roadless areas,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever in San Francisco.

Critics say the administration’s substitute policy, which allows governors to submit plans for roadless areas in their states is unwieldy, causes uncertainty and is expensive. They also contend the process shuts out the views of Americans who do not live in states with roadless areas but support their conservation. Today’s announcement comes as pressure mounts in Congress, the courts and the general public to reinstate the protections that limited logging, drilling, and other destructive activities on nearly 60 million acres of wild national forests, including 4.5 million acres in California.

A Senate bill will be introduced shortly by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) to codify the 2001 roadless rule into federal law. Last July, 145 members of Congress introduced a similar bill in the House. In addition a federal suit has been filed on behalf of three state attorneys general and two governors from four western states -- California, New Mexico, Washington and Oregon – challenging the legality of the Bush policy. Montana and Maine joined last week filing a brief in support of the suit. A second legal challenge was also filed on behalf of 20 conservation groups. (Learn more about this lawsuit at <http://www.forestsforever.org/roadlessuit.html>)

A copy of the letter submitted by over 100 groups supporting the petition drive, and more information on the roadless rule and roadless areas can be found at <http://www.ourforests.org/threats/petition.html>

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