

May 11, 2022

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing

We are writing on behalf of our millions of members and supporters to voice our strong support for the Roadless Area Conservation Act, H.R. 279, which was introduced this Congress by Representatives Ruben Gallego and Diana DeGette. This legislation would codify the U.S. Forest Service's Roadless Rule, which was adopted in 2001 to protect 58.5 million acres of National Forest land in 39 states from logging and the construction of logging roads.

Roadless Areas provide invaluable ecological, recreational, and climate benefits. They offer habitat for thousands of wildlife species, provide opportunities for recreational activities such as camping, hiking, and fishing, supply clean drinking water to millions of Americans, and save taxpayers millions of dollars by limiting expensive roadbuilding on our cherished public lands. Our National Forests, especially intact areas such as Roadless Areas, also serve as essential tools in the fight against climate change, acting as carbon sinks that store and sequester significant amounts of carbon emissions. Roadless Areas are also important for reducing wildfire risk as more than 90 percent of all fires start within 800 meters of a road.

Despite the many benefits of maintaining intact Roadless Areas on public lands, and the overwhelming public support for protection of these areas, the Roadless Rule is under attack on multiple fronts. The Forest Service finalized a rule under the Trump Administration that exempted more than 9 million acres of roadless public lands in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska from roadless protections, putting these important lands at risk of logging and road construction. Additionally, states such as Utah have sought similar exemptions, threatening millions of additional acres of roadless national forests. Given these recent events, passing legislation to codify the federal Roadless Rule is more urgent than ever.

The Roadless Area Conservation Act would save millions of taxpayer dollars by continuing to limit expensive roadbuilding and allowing the Forest Service to instead focus on maintaining its existing 371,000 miles of network roads, at a time when the agency is experiencing a 3.2 billion dollar maintenance backlog. In 2015, an analysis found that timber sales in the Tongass incurred losses of over \$20 million a year, while Forest Service expenditures continuously outpaced revenue from timber sales. The American taxpayer has subsidized these losses.

More than 240 million people are living within 100 miles of a national forest or national grassland, and Roadless Areas contribute billions to the U.S. outdoor recreation economy. For example, in 2017, the outdoor recreation economy generated \$887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million direct jobs nationally, with \$59.2 billion in local and state tax revenue. Lastly, the Roadless Rule is working exceptionally well at protecting national forest land from roadbuilding and commercial logging while providing flexibility for numerous other activities. For instance, the Forest Service has reviewed and approved, typically within two months, dozens of projects within Alaska's Roadless Areas, including 29 mining projects, 9 hydroelectric or intertie projects, a geothermal lease, and even an aerial tram.

The Roadless Area Conservation Act would permanently codify the Roadless Rule, thereby preserving the clean water, recreation, wildlife, and cultural values of National Forests nationwide. We strongly support this legislation and respectfully submit this letter as part of the hearing record.

Signed by:
350 Eugene

Advocates for Forest Carbon
Alaska Rainforest Defenders
Alaska Wilderness League Action
Appalachian Mountain Club
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Applegate Neighborhood Network
Audubon Alaska
Bark
Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine
California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild)
Cascade Forest Conservancy
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Cherokee Forest Voices
Climate Law & Policy Project
Coast Range Association
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environment America
Environment California
Environment Colorado
Environment Connecticut
Environment Florida
Environment Georgia
Environment Illinois
Environment Maine
Environment Maryland
Environment Massachusetts
Environment New Jersey
Environment North Carolina
Environment Oregon
Environment Texas
Environment Virginia
Environment Washington
Environmental Protection Information Center
Forest Keeper
Forest Web
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Inyo
Georgia ForestWatch
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
High Country Conservation Advocates
John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
League of Conservation Voters

Los Padres ForestWatch
Maine Audubon
Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network
Metro Climate Action Team (MCAT)
Montana Wilderness Association
MountainTrue
National Audubon Society
Natural Resources Council of Maine
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Mexico Sportsmen
Oregon Wild
Outdoor Alliance
PennEnvironment
Pilchuck Audubon Society
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Project Eleven Hundred
Quiet Use Coalition
Rio Grande Indivisible, NM
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Juan Citizens Alliance
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Alaska
Sierra Forest Legacy
Sitka Conservation Society
South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative
Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association
The Clinch Coalition
The Cobb Land Trust Inc.
The Wilderness Society
Western Environmental Law Center
Wild Alabama
Wild Heritage
WildEarth Guardians
Williams Community Forest Project
Winter Wildlands Alliance
Wisconsin Environment
Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN)
Wyoming Wilderness Association
Yaak Valley Forest Council