



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA FOREST SERVICE ACTS TO CONSERVE ROADLESS AREAS IN NATIONAL FORESTS Announces National Advisory Committee to Help Implement New Rule

WASHINGTON, May 5, 2005 - Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns today announced a final rule that invites input from state governors in the conservation and management direction for inventoried roadless areas within national forests. This rule will provide environmental benefits and help to ensure that the needs of local communities are considered in roadless area conservation.

"Our actions today advance President Bush's commitment to cooperatively conserve inventoried roadless areas within our national forests," Johanns said. "USDA is committed to working closely with the nation's governors to meet the needs of our local communities while protecting and restoring the health and natural beauty of our national forests."

The new rule was developed after the previous regulation, issued January 12, 2001, was struck down by a U.S. District Court in July 2003 and deemed in violation of both the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act.

The rule sets a straightforward, collaborative path toward conserving inventoried roadless areas by working with the states on regulations specific to the needs and requirements of each state. It incorporates the department's five conservation principles for inventoried roadless areas. They are:

- Make informed decisions to ensure that inventoried roadless area management is implemented with reliable information and accurate mapping, including local expertise and experience.
- Work with states, tribes, local communities and the public through a process that is fair, open and responsive to local input and information.
- Protect forests to ensure that the potential negative effects of severe wildfire, insect and disease activity are addressed.
- Protect communities, homes and property from the risk of severe wildfire and other risks on adjacent federal lands.
- Ensure that states, tribes and private citizens who own property within inventoried roadless areas have access to their property as required by existing law.

The rule allows governors to petition the secretary of agriculture to develop regulations to manage roadless areas that meet the specific needs within each state. USDA will accept state petitions from governors for 18 months after the effective date of the final rule. During the state-petitioning process, the Forest Service will continue to maintain interim measures to

conserve inventoried roadless areas.

Petitions must identify areas for inclusion and may also include ways to protect public health and safety, reduce wildfire risks to communities and critical wildlife habitat, maintain critical infrastructure (such as dams and utilities), and ensure that citizens have access to private property.

Once a state has submitted its petition and the secretary accepts it, the Forest Service will work with the state to develop and publish a subsequent state-specific rule that addresses the management requirements set forth in the petition. The state-specific rulemaking process will include any required National Environmental Policy Act analysis and invite public input during a notice and comment period. If a state chooses not to file a petition, inventoried roadless areas within that state will continue to be managed in accordance with the direction set forth in each national forest's land and resource management plan.

While 38 states and Puerto Rico have inventoried roadless areas on National Forest System lands within their boundaries, 56.6 million acres, or 97 percent, of all inventoried roadless areas in the country are contained within 12 states. Those states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

The department is also announcing the establishment of a national advisory committee to provide advice and recommendations to the secretary on implementing this rule. Members of the committee will represent diverse national organizations interested in the conservation and management of National Forest System inventoried roadless areas.

The final rule and the notice announcing the establishment of the advisory committee will be published in the Federal Register this week and are available at <http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us>.

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