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USDA UPHOLDS ROADLESS PROTECTIONS RULE

Secretary Veneman announces additional actions to address reasonable concerns to ensure responsible implementation

WASHINGTON, May 4, 2001 -- Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture will implement the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, restricting logging and road building activities in 58.5 million acres of national forest lands. The Secretary also announced additional actions to address reasonable concerns raised about the rule that will ensure implementation in a responsible, common sense manner.

“This administration is committed to providing roadless protection for our national forests,” said Veneman. “Conserving these precious lands requires a responsible and balanced approach that fairly addresses concerns raised by local communities, tribes, and states impacted by the rule.”

In announcing implementation of the rule, effective May 12, 2001, Veneman said the Department will propose responsible amendments in early June that will address important issues raised about the rule, based on the following five principles:

- **Informed decision-making** – The rule will be implemented with more reliable information and accurate mapping. This includes drawing on local expertise and experience through the local forest planning process;
- **Working together** – USDA will work with states, tribes, local communities and the public through a process that is fair, open, and responsive to local input and information;
- **Protecting forests** – USDA will protect roadless areas from the negative effects of severe wildfire, insect and disease activity;
- ***Protecting communities, homes, and property*** – *USDA will work to protect communities, homes, and property from the risk of severe wildfire and other risks that might exist on adjacent federal lands; and*
- **Protecting access to property** – USDA will ensure that states, tribes, and private citizens who own property within roadless areas have access to their property as required by existing law.

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“Because roadless protection is the right thing to do, it is important that we do it right,” Veneman said. “The actions we are announcing today are responsible.

They ensure forest protection and address important concerns that could adversely impact local communities.”

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, published Jan. 12, 2001, was challenged in the Federal District Court by the State of Idaho. The Judge withheld ruling on the preliminary injunction and issued an order citing several defects with the process by which the rule was developed, and reserving it's ruling pending issuance of the government's status report, due on May 4, 2001.

That report, to be filed with the Court later today, outlines the Administration's intended actions in this matter, including allowing the current Rule to go into effect on May 12, 2001 with amendments to be proposed in June.

A total of six lawsuits have been filed by states, tribes, and various interested parties challenging this rule. The actions announced today by USDA are aimed at protecting the principles of the rule, correcting data errors, and addressing concerns raised by the court, local communities, tribes, and state governments. For example, the rule designated more than 2.5 million acres of land as roadless that actually have roads.

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Note to Editors: Additional information can be found at <http://www.usda.gov>.