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United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Contact:
Ed Loyd (202) 720-4623
Forest Service Press Office (202) 205-1134

USDA ACCEPTS FIRST THREE STATE PETITIONS FOR CONSERVING ROADLESS AREAS IN NATIONAL FORESTS

WASHINGTON, June 21, 2006- Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns today approved petitions from North Carolina Governor Mike Easley, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford and Virginia Governor Tim Kaine to develop state-specific rules for managing roadless areas in the three states.

"We are 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," said Johanns. "I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with Governors Easley, Sanford, Kaine and others in the conservation and management of these important areas."

The three petitions were recently reviewed by the 13-member Roadless Area Conservation National Advisory Committee, established by Johanns to provide advice and recommendations on implementing the State Petitions for Inventoried Roadless Area Management Rule.

Governor Mike Easley said, "I am pleased that North Carolina is among the first states to have its petition accepted but this is only a first step in protecting these roadless National Forest areas in North Carolina from development. We look forward to joining with the National Forest Service representatives to expeditiously work toward putting permanent rules in place so these lands remain unspoiled for future generations."

Governor Mark Sanford said, "The quality of life in our state is going to be an increasingly important part of South Carolina's competitive edge when it comes to the global race for jobs and investment. The approval of our request to keep these areas roadless --along with our ongoing efforts to protect other ecologically significant land in the state -- is an important step toward preserving the way we look and feel as a state and preserve our competitive advantage with respect to our quality of life."

Governor Tim Kaine said, "My administration looks forward to beginning the rulemaking process as we continue working to protect the important roadless areas in our national forests. I commend the Secretary's decision, and appreciate the Committee's thoughtful review of Virginia's petition."

The Forest Service will now work with North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia to develop and publish proposed state-specific rules that address the management requirements set forth in the petitions. The state-specific rulemaking process will include any required National Environmental Policy Act analysis and invite public input during a notice and

comment period. USDA will make the determination on the adoption of any final federal rule.

USDA is accepting state petitions until November 13, 2006. After a petition is received, the advisory committee has 90 days to review it and provide recommendations to the Secretary. 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. During the state-petitioning process, the Forest Service will continue to maintain interim measures to conserve inventoried roadless areas.

The State Petitions for Inventoried Roadless Area Management Rule was adopted by USDA in May 2005 and established a process to provide governors an opportunity to establish or adjust management requirements for National Forest System inventoried roadless areas within their states.

For more information, visit www.roadless.fs.fed.us

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