

Route To:

Subject:Letter from Mike Dombeck, Chief

To:All Employees

Today, the Forest Service proposed to end road construction in nearly one quarter of the 192 million acre National Forest System. Over 25 years of local planning, lawsuits, and controversy have failed to resolve the roadless area issue. New leadership and new direction are needed. The fact that we may even contemplate protection of roadless lands that total about one quarter of the National Forest System is testament to our proud legacy of conservation.

Our proposal would ensure that the greatest threat to roadless lands, road construction, is removed and that the important characteristics of these areas are evaluated and considered to determine through forest planning if they should receive additional protection in the future.

As more and more private lands, forests, open space, wetlands, and farmland are developed the social and ecological values of roadless areas become increasingly important. Our largely undeveloped roadless areas provide:

- Refuges for rare plant, wildlife and fish species;
- Clean, pure drinking water for thousands of communities;
- Opportunities for dispersed recreation;
- Reference areas for research and study; and
- Places of solitude and spiritual renewal where families may reconnect with the lands and waters that sustain them.

This proposal responds to President Clinton's direction to develop options for conserving for future generations some of the last, best, unprotected wildland anywhere in our nation. Another President, Theodore Roosevelt, once described conservation as applying common sense to common problems for the common good. I think this is an apt description of our proposal.

The Forest Service backlog on maintenance and reconstruction of our existing road system is well over \$8 billion dollars per year. We currently receive about 20% of the funding that we need to take care of our existing road system. It makes little sense to build new roads in valuable roadless areas when we can afford to maintain so little of our existing road system.

Many have charged that protecting roadless areas will block public access to their public lands. This proposal proves them wrong. Not a single authorized road will be closed as a result of our roadless proposal. All existing and legal access would be preserved.

We are at a major milestone in the public process. I ask you to help people understand the nature and content of this straightforward proposal. We will hold over 330 public meetings in communities large and small to explain this proposal and garner public input. Our proposal can, and will, be improved based on public involvement and review.

Many will argue this proposal does not go far enough. Others will say it goes too far. At its root, it is a measured and common sense proposal that ensures that the very values that draw hundreds of millions of Americans to their forests will be protected and conserved for the use and benefit of future generations.

/s/ Mike Dombeck

MIKE DOMBECK

Chief