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## Support the Roadless Area Conservation Act

### *Law would permanently protect roadless areas*

Not wanting to trust the nation's roadless forests to the Bush-appointed secretary of agriculture, two U.S. legislators have re-introduced companion bills in the House and the Senate that will write the protections of the original Roadless Area Conservation Rule into federal law.

The bill was first introduced in 2003 in the Senate by Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and in the House by Jay Inslee (D-WA).

Responding to the Bush administration's repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule on May 5, 2005, Representatives Inslee and Sherwood Boehlert (R- NY) re-introduced [The National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act \(H.R. 3563\)](#) on July 28. The bill has 149 bipartisan co-sponsors so far.

Then on Mar. 2, 2006, a companion bill, [S. 2364](#), was re-introduced in the Senate by Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA). Ten of her Senate colleagues joined the bill as co-sponsors.

The Roadless Area Conservation Act would provide permanent protection for roadless areas in the national forests. The act would supersede both the original roadless rule and the U.S. Forest Service's recent regulation that overturned it.

The original Roadless Area Conservation Rule was written during the Clinton administration and went into effect in January 2001. The roadless rule protected 58.5 million roadless acres of national forest from roadbuilding, logging, drilling, mining, and other development. It was the most popular environmental rule ever written, with more than 4.2 million public comments over all comment periods. The overwhelming majority of comments— 97.9 percent— were favorable to the original, protective rule.



Bell Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, Eldorado National Forest. *Photo courtesy USDA Forest Service.*

On May 5, 2005, the Bush administration revoked the popular rule and replaced it with a complicated bureaucratic process that forces governors to petition the Forest Service if they want to protect the roadless areas in their state. The rule leaves the final decision on all roadless areas up to the secretary of agriculture, who can accept or reject the petitions.

There are many good reasons to preserve the roadless areas in our national forests. Roadless lands preserve essential watersheds and help ensure an abundant supply of clean drinking water. By keeping large areas of forest undisturbed, we can provide refuges for endangered wildlife and avoid fragmenting habitat. Undisturbed lands are an effective barrier to invasive species– a growing problem nationwide. And roadless areas provide a wide array of recreational opportunities.

We don't need more roads in our national forests. There are already 386,000 miles of them– enough to encircle the globe 15 times. The Forest Service already has a road maintenance backlog of more than \$10 billion dollars– at a time when its annual budget is more likely to be cut than expanded.

"Punching roads through America's last remaining untouched forests to subsidize short-term logging, mining, and energy development projects is unfair to future generations," said Sen. Cantwell in a [press release](#) announcing her bill's re-introduction.

"Americans don't want to see their hunting, fishing, and hiking areas turned into a reckless patchwork of road-building, logging, and mining."

A law enacted by Congress would ensure that roadless protections are not subject to the whims of a hostile executive branch. It would provide protection for the last unroaded forests in the country– permanently.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

The Roadless Area Conservation Act now in Congress is the best way to preserve roadless areas in our national forests. Ask your congressional representatives to support Inslee and Boehlert's National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act (H.R. 3563) in the House. If they have already promised their support, thank them for helping to protect our roadless forests.

Call your representative through the Congressional Switchboard, 202/224-3121, and ask him or her to support the Roadless Area Conservation Act today.

You can find your representative's contact information at:  
<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

In the Senate, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) is already a co-sponsor of the Roadless Area Conservation Act (S. 2364). Please contact Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and urge her to support the measure as well. Sen. Feinstein can be reached at:

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