

Protecting New Hampshire's Wild Places

Roadless Area Conservation Rule in the White Mountain National Forest

The White Mountain National Forest is under assault.



Center for Biological Diversity

Everyone in New England loves our national forests but few may realize one of the most popular is under assault. Covering almost 800,000 acres in New Hampshire and Maine, the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) contains some of the most untamed and beautiful country remaining in the Northeast – yet the Forest Service is approving more destructive logging projects on this single protected “roadless” forests than it has for the rest of the entire country combined.

These actions could deliver devastating blows to our unroaded lands ... forests that safeguard clean drinking water for millions of Americans, provide an abundance of recreational opportunities, protect

habitat for wildlife, and help provide a defense against the increasing threats of global warming.

We need to stop this destruction now by making our voices heard. We need to tell U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack that he should amend the 2009 “time out” he called on all logging and mining projects proposed for national forest roadless areas in the White Mountain and the rest of the country. Though his interim directive stops local forest supervisors, who may be more interested in harvesting timber than saving ecosystems, from knocking down our forests, it does not apply to all roadless acres. On the White Mountain National Forest, the measures leave more than 140,000 acres vulnerable to exploitation.

What is a roadless forest?

Roadless forests are unroaded public lands protected by the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule – a policy approved by the Clinton administration that keeps some 58.5 million acres of forests free from road building, logging and mining. The widely popular roadless rule is considered the most extensive rulemaking process in history because more than 1.6 million people submitted comments on the proposal, including statements of support from more than 15,000 New Hampshire residents. The rule is also supported by a decade of scientific research.



White Mountains Attractions Association

America's national forests include an immense road network -- 380,000 miles. The rule helps manage the network as well as the associated environmental effects that roads cause, including wildlife mortality, habitat fragmentation, the spread of invasive species, and runoff. As the span of roads in national forests is already more than eight times the length of the U.S. interstate highway system, we do not need more roads in our national forests.

Our national forests harbor millions of acres of unroaded lands. These pristine areas safeguard clean water in forest streams and watersheds. Roadless lands also provide an abundance of recreational opportunities, such as hiking, fishing, hunting, and camping.

Roadless areas across the U.S. include key habitat for over 1,500 species, including many threatened or endangered plant and animal species. In addition, mature forests cover much of the unroaded land in our National Forests -- ecosystems critical in storing carbon and mitigating the harmful impacts of global warming.

What are the threats against the national roadless rule?

For most of the past eight years, the rule has survived on-going legal attacks and administrative maneuvers by the former Bush administration. As an administrative rule is weaker than a law passed by the legislative body, conservation organizations and

people across the country have had to join forces to repel these attempts to weaken protection for our roadless forests. Currently, due to a number of court battles and attacks from the Bush administration, the roadless rule is no longer in effect in the majority of roadless areas, including here in New Hampshire and Maine. (Visit www.wilderness.org and search "roadless" to learn more.)

What's at risk in the White Mountain National Forest?

The forest encompasses a variety of uses and is located within a day's drive of 75 million people. The White Mountains are home to moose, black bear, peregrine falcon, pine martin, spruce grouse, long tail shrew and America's national symbol -- the bald eagle. The White Mountain National Forest is one of the most visited national forests in the United States, drawing more than six million visitors a year. It's also the largest public land unit in New England.

When the roadless rule was established, the Forest Service made a list (inventory) that classified 241,000 acres in New Hampshire as roadless. During the forest planning process, however, an additional 162,000 acres of roadless lands (called newly inventoried roadless areas) were identified in the White Mountain National Forest, bringing the total acreage worthy of protection to 403,000 acres.



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The local office of the Forest Service has declared that 142,000 of those new acres (a whopping 35 percent of all roadless acres in the forest) do not deserve protection and has approved eight logging

projects on newly inventoried roadless areas in the White Mountains -- more projects than proposed on all other national forest inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) *combined*.

We oppose the agency's view that the new acres should be opened to timber harvesting because it violates the spirit of the roadless rule: Every acre of forest classified as roadless should be protected by the 2001 rule.



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Logging projects already underway.

The Forest Service has already begun logging on the White Mountain's Wild River IRA and South Carr Mountain IRA, and the agency recently approved roadless area logging projects in Kilkenny IRA and Sandwich 4 IRA.

Kilkenny: More than 37,000 roadless acres are located in the northernmost section of the national forest. Protection of this wild forest may be our last hope for ensuring adequate habitat for the Canada lynx to reestablish itself in the Northeast.

Sandwich 4: This 21,400-acre roadless area is nearby one of the forest's most beloved wilderness areas—Sandwich Range in the south-central portion of the forest. The 860-acre Greeley Pond scenic area is also within the IRA.

South Carr Mountain: This 22,265-acre roadless area, located in the southwestern corner of the forest, is a transition zone between the lowland lakes region and the rugged high peaks to the north. The

IRA is home to moose, black bear, pink lady slippers, and three ponds with brook trout and waterfowl.

Wild River: Some 23,700 acres of this 71,000-acre roadless area were recently designated as wilderness, leaving a 47,300-acre IRA. Wild River is one of the most remote valleys in the Whites, and the wilderness and roadless area combined contain the entire watershed. A favorite hiking spot for visitors, the river valley is surrounded by peaks reaching 4,500 feet.

What can you do to help?

Restoring and protecting the wild character of these unique places will protect our drinking water, conserve land that is home to countless recreational activities, and help defend our region against the harmful effects of global warming. It will also provide a haven for wildlife -- habitat required by the Canada lynx, catamount, and many other rare and endangered plant and wildlife species.

The Wilderness Society needs your help. Contact Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today at AgSec@usda.gov and tell him to amend his time-out on our roadless forests to include the 142,000 newly inventoried roadless acres in the White Mountains. This would require all road building, logging and mining projects proposed for these areas to be personally approved by his office instead of by local forest supervisors, who may be more motivated to harvest timber rather than protect forests.

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