

forest **GUILD**

Position Statement:

Roadless Area Conservation Rule for National Forests

(October 2003)

The Forest Guild supports the adoption of The Roadless Area Conservation Rule and disagrees with the Bush administration's decision to open the rule to modification. Practicing foresters recognize that roadless areas are a necessary component of sound forest management and that the roadless policy developed from a thorough democratic process.

The Guild believes that forest areas free from the impacts of roads and other human interventions are an essential component of sustainable resource management. Such areas serve as important laboratories from which we learn nature's dynamic processes and thereby minimize our impacts when harvesting trees on roaded land. Roadless forest areas act as a barrier against noxious invasive plant and animal species, and as strongholds for native fish populations. They are critical biological refugia for plants and animals that cannot live near roads or in recently disturbed forests. The 386,000 miles of roads now in our National Forests exceed the mileage of the U.S. interstate system. Keeping them in good condition prevents erosion that directly affects water quality. But existing roads require \$440 million for annual maintenance and there is already an \$8.4 billion backlog for maintenance and repair. It's hard to justify building more roads when we can't adequately maintain what we already have. Finally, many of the inventoried roadless areas are marginal for timber production; the most productive areas have already been brought under commercial forest management. Forest managers need to recapture the public trust by sustainably managing National Forest lands currently open to commercial timber harvesting, rather than exposing additional forest land to these same commercial treatments. Our country can afford to conserve roadless lands as an investment in our forestry education and as a legacy for future generations of Americans.

Contrary to current characterizations, The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is anything but a last minute gambit of the Clinton administration. The proposed rule is the culmination of intensive consultation with thousands of Americans around the country. Ninety-five percent of the people who participated in the 600 open meetings or the 1.6 million comments received over the 18-month comment period supported it. This shows a strong national interest in roadless area protection. It has been said that the rule does not allow decisions about roadless area land use to be made at the local level through the forest planning process, but rather imposes constraints at the national level to which all national forests must adhere. What forum better carries the voice of the local people than meetings held in small towns and large cities throughout the country? Certainly not a courtroom with a judge and a few lawyers, where these issues have often ended up playing out in challenges to forest plans which further delays important action on the ground. Further, the rule does not totally eliminate road building and timber harvesting in roadless areas, but allows for local flexibility in response to local conditions. Americans across the country have expressed their opinions: let the rule stand and be implemented.

The real issue is people's overall concern about practices used to manage forests and produce the wood products on which we depend. Our job as forestry professionals is to be as concerned with how we leave the forest as with what we take from it. Our job as citizens is to re-examine how much wood and fiber we use and conserve and recycle when we can.

Many foresters see *both* the forest and the trees. The Forest Guild believes in maintaining the 58.5 million acres of roadless area within the National Forests as a component of sound forest management, and supports the roadless area policy as a voice of democracy.