Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Roadless Area Conservation Rule Rescission – DEIS & Proposed Rule

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Schultz,

As Members of Congress representing a broad range of communities, stakeholders, and outdoor interests, we write in strong support of the U.S. Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("Roadless Rule") and in firm opposition to the Department of Agriculture's proposal for rescission. We urge the Department to halt this effort and instead focus on effective implementation of this longstanding and successful policy.

Since its adoption in 2001, the Roadless Rule has served as a cornerstone of public lands conservation, now protecting approximately 44 million acres of National Forest System lands across 37 states. These areas provide clean drinking water, critical wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and world-class recreation opportunities. Iconic landscapes such as the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, and the George Washington National Forest in Virginia exemplify the ecological, cultural, and economic importance of these lands.

The Roadless Rule was developed through one of the most robust public processes in federal rulemaking history. The Forest Service received 1.6 million public comments - approximately 95 percent in support - and held over 600 public meetings nationwide. In contrast, the current rescission effort has lacked meaningful public engagement. The Department provided just 21 days for public comment on the Notice of Intent in 2025 and has yet to hold any public meetings. Despite these limitations, more than 600,000 comments were submitted, with over 99 percent opposing rescission. This overwhelming and bipartisan public support underscores the continued popularity and importance of the Roadless Rule. Unsurprisingly, at just 30 days, the ongoing comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and proposed rule is equally insufficient, and we encourage the USFS to extend the comment period to 120 days for a fair and transparent process.

Given the extraordinary public interest in the Roadless Rule and the significant consequences that its repeal would have for communities across the country, the Forest Service should also conduct a robust series of in-person public meetings before finalizing any rescission. Additionally, Tribes are entitled to the opportunity to engage in robust consultation, as the repeal of the Rule will have dramatic consequences on their way of life. When the Roadless Rule was originally developed, the aforementioned 600 public meetings ensured that affected communities, Tribes, local governments, industry, recreation interests, and conservation organizations had the opportunity to engage directly with the agency. The proposal to repeal the Rule warrants the same level of public engagement. Public meetings should be held in regions where National Forest System roadless areas are most affected, providing local communities with a meaningful opportunity to ask questions, provide testimony, and ensure the administrative record reflects the perspectives of those who will experience the greatest impacts. A transparent, accessible, and geographically representative public engagement process is

essential to maintaining public confidence in the rulemaking process and ensuring the agency fully considers the consequences of such a consequential policy change.

The enduring support for the Roadless Rule is rooted in its clear and measurable benefits. Over the past 25 years, the rule has helped protect watersheds, biodiversity, and ecosystem integrity by limiting road construction and large-scale logging in undeveloped areas. Forest Service data show that watersheds within roadless areas are far more likely to be in "properly functioning" condition compared to those outside of them, which are more often classified as "at risk" or "impaired."[1]

These healthy ecosystems support a wide array of wildlife. Roadless areas provide habitat for hundreds of species listed or proposed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, including grizzly bears, lynx, and other sensitive species, and disproportionately support species of conservation concern. In addition, these areas play a vital role in climate resilience and carbon storage. For example, the Tongass National Forest alone stores over 1.5 billion metric tons of carbon and sequesters millions more annually.

Claims that the Roadless Rule impedes wildfire management are not supported by the evidence. The rule explicitly allows for wildfire prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction. In fact, nearly 2 million acres of roadless areas have undergone fuel treatments in recent years.[2] Forest Service data also show that roadless areas account for a significant share of fuel treatment activities relative to their forest coverage. Research further indicates that wildfire risk is comparable inside and outside of roadless areas and that roads are not necessary to maintain forest health.

Moreover, scientific studies demonstrate that wildfire ignitions occur far more frequently in roaded areas due to human activity.[3] By limiting road construction, the Roadless Rule helps reduce ignition risks from sources such as vehicles, campfires, and other human causes.

Finally, the economic benefits of the Roadless Rule are substantial. By avoiding the construction and maintenance of new roads, the rule saves taxpayers billions of dollars. The Forest Service already faces a road maintenance backlog of nearly $6 billion across its existing system.[4] Expanding road networks into remote and often economically unviable areas would only increase these costs. At the same time, protected roadless areas support recreation, tourism, and outdoor economies, while safeguarding clean water and subsistence resources that communities rely on. When it comes to outdoor recreation, roadless areas encompass more than 25,000 miles of trails, 8,500 climbing routes, 1,000 miles of whitewater, and more than 10,000 miles of mountain biking trails across the country, all of which support a $1.3 trillion outdoor recreation economy. Additionally, hunters and anglers across the nation access these public lands where backcountry provides ample fishing and hunting. The Roadless Rule protects drinking water in 354 municipal watersheds, saving downstream communities millions of dollars in water filtration costs.[5]

After 25 years of successful implementation, the conclusion is clear: the Roadless Rule is effective, widely supported, and essential to responsible forest management. Rescinding it would undermine decades of progress and impose unnecessary environmental and fiscal costs.

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[1] https://www.wilderness.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Report-WatershedHealthinWildernessEtc_2012.pdf

[2] https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/09/17/ex-forest-service-chiefs-warn-against-logging-ban-repeal-00569334

[3] Aplet G. et al. "Three-decade record of contiguous-U.S. national forest wildfires indicates increased density of ignitions near roads." Fire Ecology; Balch J.K. et al., "Human-started wildfires expand the fire niche across the United States." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. (2017) 11(114): 2946–2951.

[4] https://www.taxpayer.net/energy-natural-resources/comments-on-noi-to-repeal-the-roadless-rule/

[5] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/01/12/01-726/special-areas-roadless-area-conservation

We respectfully urge the Department to end its unjustified rescission of the Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,

Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
United States Senator

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

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Brian K. Fitzpatrick
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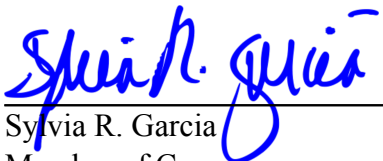
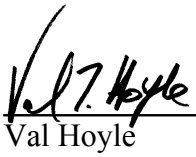


Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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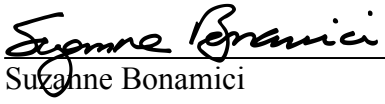
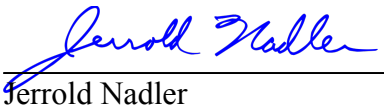
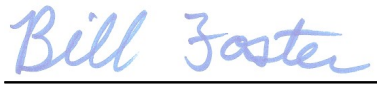


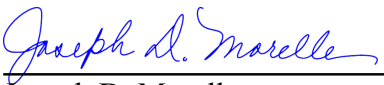
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



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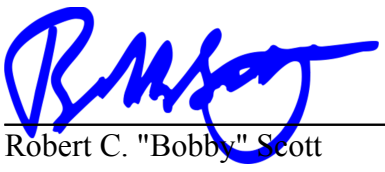

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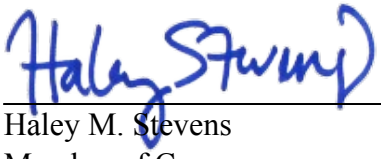
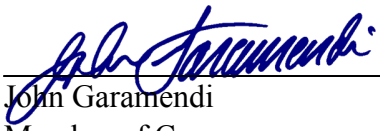


Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



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James R. Walkinshaw
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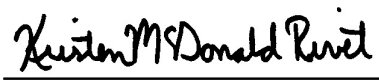

Kristen McDonald Rivet
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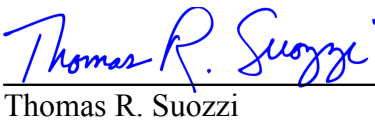
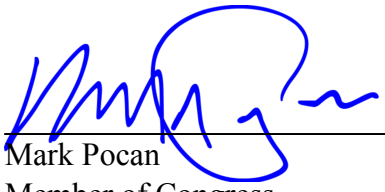


Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



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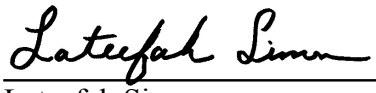
Member of Congress

Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
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Lucy McBath
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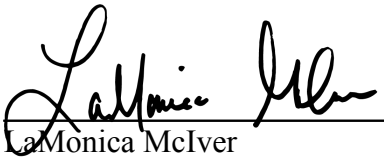

LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress

George Whitesides
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Jim Himes
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