

Dear { }:

I am a {resident, property owner, frequent visitor} of {Avery, Burke, McDowell County,...}, NC and a {member, supporter} of the Lake James Environmental Association. I am opposed to the rescission of the US Forest Service Roadless Rule.

The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule conserves over 58 million acres of multiple-use public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service that provide some of the best places to hike, horseback ride, hunt, fish, and off-road travel across our nation. I urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to uphold strong protections for all roadless areas.

Nearly 32,000 acres of the Lake James Watershed will be adversely impacted by the rescission of the Rule. It will damage the ecological health of our forests, increase wildfire occurrences, degrade our water quality, reduce backcountry hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities, and increase the introduction of invasive species to our land and water. The current Rule provides protection to only 13% of our watershed, leaving 87% open for road construction that supports commercial-scale timber harvesting, mining, and similar activities. Our region's economy is strongly tied to our natural resources and outdoor recreation. We need to protect that remaining 13%. Rescission of the Rule will significantly harm our health, welfare, and our economy.

The Roadless Rule generally prohibits new road construction and industrial logging, while at the same time keeping these public lands open to habitat improvement projects, hazardous fuels reduction, hunting, fishing, Off-Highway Vehicles and horseback riding, firewood cutting, grazing, and camping. The current Rule allows for balanced forest management, including road construction, timber harvest and prescribed burns necessary to reduce the risk of wildfire, as well as to restore habitat for sensitive species. Hazardous fuels treatments in roadless areas are commonplace, in fact more common on a per acre basis than our National Forests in general. Those allowed treatments help protect our at-risk communities and sustain forest health.

There are 370,000 miles of roads in the National Forest System and the USFS has a maintenance backlog of \$10.8 billion, 55% of which is due to dilapidated roads that cause sedimentation and erosion that reduce water quality, create barriers to fish migration, damage vehicles, and create public safety hazards. We need to take care of the roads we already have, not add more roads that we don't have the funding or personnel to maintain.

Again, for the benefit of our nation and my community, I strongly oppose rescission of the Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,