

Take Action: Defend Oregon's Wild Forests – Oppose H.R. 7695 and S.140

On June 10, 2026, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee voted 11–9 to advance S.140, this would repeal the 2001 Roadless Rule which prevents new roadbuilding and most commercial timber harvesting on more than 58 million acres of undeveloped land within the National Forest System.

Now is a great time to voice your concern.

Urge your congresspersons and the Forest Service to listen to the American people and scientists and stop rescinding rules that protect our communities and our forests. It will not be simple, but we need to ensure that the agency refocuses its resources on advancing science-based forest management projects. That path will help ensure our forests continue to support wildlife, provide clean drinking water through protection of our watersheds, reduce the threat of wildfires, and offer much-needed places for connection and recreation.

SEND MESSAGES TO YOUR SENATORS, U.S. REPRESENTATIVES, AND GOVERNOR

Senator Jeff Merkley: [Email Jeff - Merkley](#)

Senator Ron Wyden: [Email Ron | Contact | U.S. Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon](#)

Representative Val Hoyle: [Email Val | Congresswoman Val Hoyle](#)

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Weighing the Roadless Rule's Legacy Against Its Repeal: What's at stake for Oregon's national forests?

The Roads Not Taken: How the Roadless Rule Protects Our Forests

The health and well-being of our national forests are under threat and need your help to ensure their continued protection. The 2001 Clinton administration-era rule, which followed an 18-month public review process that accepted 1.8 million comments, prevents new road building and most commercial timber harvesting on more than 58 million acres of undeveloped land within the National Forest System. It is officially known as the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule, or Roadless Rule.

Two bills in the U.S. Congress right now, H.R. 7695 and S. 140, are advancing efforts to rescind the Roadless Rule. U.S. Forest Service Chiefs, representing hunters and anglers, are condemning a last-minute “poison pill” amendment to the bipartisan fire-prevention bill that would roll back protections on millions of acres of roadless areas in national forests. As it stands

now, the Roadless Rule **does** allow federal agencies to take steps to prevent the spread of wildfires. It also allows prescribed burning and forest thinning for preventing fire and improving habitats for native species. Most research suggests that roads increase wildfire frequency in forests because more roads bring more people, and humans spark most wildfires.

In Oregon alone, 60 percent of the almost 18 million acres of forests are federally managed. Private owners, including Native American tribes, manage 36 percent; state and county governments manage 4 percent. "If the Roadless Rule is repealed, like the administration is proposing, these places will lose important protections," said Sami Godlove, Oregon Wild Bend Field Coordinator. "As we cut more roads through these wild places, that permanently **destroys the forest's health and impacts clean drinking water, wildlife habitat and these outstanding recreational opportunities, places where people can go find solitude.**" Within Lane County, 8,000 acres surrounding Hardesty Mountain in the Willamette National Forest are protected under the Roadless Rule, and nearly 120,000 acres of national forest lands surrounding our county also fall under its edicts.

Federal lands are managed primarily for ecosystem values, such as habitat conservation for threatened and endangered species, or recreation. State lands tend to be managed for multiple uses, including recreation, water, wildlife habitat, and timber. Private timber company lands are managed primarily for timber production while also providing wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities. The Forest Service published a notice on the rule change on Aug. 29, 2025. The Department of Agriculture cited the need to increase forest and wildfire management and boost the pace of resource extraction as reasons for revoking the Roadless Rule.

Research, however, contradicts the government's claim that building more roads will help fight wildfires. A 2020 U.S. Forest Service study from the Rocky Mountain Research Station concluded, after nearly 20 years of monitoring data, that more roads do not lead to better forest health through increased fire-management activity. Additionally, the Roadless Rule allows the USFS to pursue a full fire-suppression strategy and authorizes otherwise prohibited activities (such as road building and tree cutting) for public health and safety or to reduce wildfire risk. The National Environmental Policy Act requires the government to conduct environmental impact assessments on proposed rule changes, a process that can take years. However, the present administration appears to be fast-tracking that timeline.

Sportsman support

"The best hunting and fishing is off the beaten path. With public lands, there are no 'No Trespassing' signs, and for the guy who can't afford a guided trip, keeping wild lands wild is key to providing a quality experience," said Mike Dombek, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service. While outdoors groups devoted great effort to public lands-sales language in Congress, the present administration announced plans to rescind the 25-year-old Roadless Rule.

Dombek led the rulemaking process as chief of the U.S. Forest Service under President Clinton. Originally from northwestern Wisconsin, he spent a career in public service, mostly in fisheries, earning multiple degrees, including a masters from the University of Minnesota. He also worked

in the first Bush administration and was acting director of the Bureau of Land Management in 1994. In an interview for *Outdoor News*, Dombeck said,

We did our homework in implementing this rule with more than 600 public hearings. Reviewing 1.8M comments is very labor intensive, and 90% of those comments were supportive of the rule, and in fact most comments wanted more restrictions on roads, not less. I always viewed the rule as conservative. It doesn't cost taxpayers any money. Not building roads means they don't have to be maintained. That's expensive out West, with landslides, etc. When we wrote it, the road maintenance backlog was significant and it's probably still growing.

Humans cause the highest proportion of fire ignition, and the highest rates occur with 500 feet of a road. So the data does not support that. The current roadless rule also (includes) numerous exclusions for things like forest management to reduce fire....We have 386,000 miles of roads in the national forest system now – more miles than the U.S. Interstate Highway System. It's a simple question of how many roads do we need? This is a rule that's important to sportsmen.

Roadless Rule Impact in Oregon

In June 2026, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden warned that a Republican proposal to repeal the federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule could open some of Oregon's most popular recreation areas to development and increase wildfire risks. In Oregon, nearly 2 million acres are protected under the rule, including areas surrounding the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway, forests near Mount Bachelor and portions of Mount Hood and Willamette national forests. In Central Oregon, conservation group Central Oregon LandWatch estimates nearly 200,000 acres of inventoried roadless areas could be affected by repeal, including about 137,000 acres in the Deschutes National Forest and 61,000 acres in the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grasslands. Areas identified by the group include Tumalo Creek, Tumalo Mountain, lands surrounding Three Creeks Lake and Tam McArthur Rim, forests west and south of Mount Bachelor, portions of the Metolius basin near Green Ridge, areas near Paulina Lake and East Lake, and roadless lands near Waldo Lake.

Other State "Roadless Rules"

Today, the 2001 Roadless Rule applies to nearly 45 million acres of National Forest System lands. Colorado, Idaho, and Alaska passed their own state-specific rules. The 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule protects undeveloped areas of the National Forests by prohibiting new roads and other development activities that could undermine their natural resource value. The rule conserves 4.2 million acres of pristine backcountry in Colorado's eight National Forests, nearly 400,000 more acres than the 2001 Roadless Rule it replaces. Importantly, the Colorado rule provides significantly increased protection for 1.2 million acres of high-quality roadless acres. In return for additional protections, the Colorado Roadless Rule provides flexibility for potential expansion of ski areas on about 8,000 acres and for temporary road construction and

placement of methane vents associated with underground coal mining on about 19,700 acres in the North Fork Coal Mining Area. This addresses a state-specific interest in managing roadless areas while providing opportunities for energy development and other benefits such as supporting local economies.

Protected through state legislation since 2008, Idaho's Roadless Areas make up the core of the largest intact forest ecosystem in the lower 48 states, where all of the native plants, fish, and wildlife can still be found and are the cornerstone of the state's world class hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation heritage. These are managed by a state commission, which includes representatives from industry, conservation, state, tribal, and local leaders, as well as other stakeholders.

Alaska's 2020 version of the Roadless Rule had exempted the Tongass National Forest in Alaska from roadless protections. The Tongass is the largest U.S. National Forest at 16.7 million acres, an expanse larger than 10 U.S. states and 75 U.N. member nations. Most of its area is temperate rainforest and is remote enough to be home to many species of endangered and rare flora and fauna. In 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture restored protections in the Tongass National Forest, once again prohibiting most timber harvesting and road construction activities.

Arguments in Favor of Rescinding the Roadless Rule

Supporters of rescission argue the rule prevents effective wildfire management and blocks economic activity like logging, mining, and infrastructure. Pacific Legal Foundation's case involving an Alaska electric utility barred from road access is a frequently cited example. Another claim is that the Roadless Rule has restricted active management by limiting access and road construction, thus delaying lawful harvesting, habitat work, and essential maintenance within already restrictive frameworks and leading to the megafires we face today.

Opponents—including many conservation groups—counter that public polling shows broad, bipartisan support for keeping the rule (76 percent to 13 percent support among likely voters when asked specifically about it. Research suggests that areas near forest roads actually see higher wildfire ignition rates than roadless areas, making the wildfire-risk rationale for rescission contested science.

League positions:

The League of Women Voters of Oregon adopted the following policy at its convention in 2021:

- That all benefits of the forests—ecological, human and economic—are inextricably interconnected. Healthy forests are essential to habitat for a diversity of plant and animal life, to the hydrologic cycle, and to carbon storage to mitigate global warming. In addition, healthy forests are essential to a forest products industry with the jobs and goods they provide, and to the economic and aesthetic values of their recreational opportunities.

- Laws and policies to ensure that forest management (for timber extraction, recreation or any other activity) must be carried out in a manner that will sustain healthy forests, streams and habitats.

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