

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 24, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Rollins,

We write to express profound concern with your recent decision to fully rescind the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This critical environmental safeguard ensures the protection of 58.5 million acres of our nation's most pristine wild forestlands and provides durable climate benefits; protects watersheds that provide drinking water to millions of Americans; preserves critical habitats for threatened species; and supports recreation opportunities for American communities.

In your announcement, you claimed that this rule is overly restrictive and limits our ability to protect forests from devastating fires. However, the Roadless Rule already includes commonsense provisions to allow road construction to protect public health and safety and timber harvests when needed to maintain healthy ecosystems and reduce wildfire risks. Moreover, evidence shows that roads actually increase the risk of fire. According to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS):

“Building roads into inventoried roadless areas would likely increase the chance of human-caused fires due to the increased presence of people. Fire occurrence data indicates that prohibiting road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas would not cause an increase in the number of acres burned by wildland fires or in the number of large fires.”<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, recent analysis of wildfire data shows that fires are nearly four times as likely within 50 meters of roads as in roadless areas.<sup>2</sup> Further, USFS has stated that “the agency rarely builds new roads to suppress fires.”<sup>3</sup> It is simply untrue to assert that repealing the Roadless Rule will necessarily result in fewer or less damaging fires or that the USFS lacks the flexibility to respond effectively to these disasters.

This also represents a significant potential burden on USFS resources at a time when your Administration has pursued staff reductions and proposed spending cuts that threaten the agency's ability to effectively carry out its mission. This Administration has already put more Americans at risk from wildfire as a result of dismantling the Forest Service. Rescinding the Roadless Rule will only exacerbate the wildfire crisis facing our western communities. Now is not the time to ask this critical agency to do more with less.

USFS already has an enormous backlog of maintenance needs for the existing 368,102-mile road system, which will cost \$5,980,000,000 to eliminate.<sup>4</sup> One of the many reasons the Roadless Rule was adopted 25 years ago was to stop the excessive and fiscally irresponsible road construction that was

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<sup>1</sup> 36 CFR 294 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2001-01-12/pdf/01-726.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wilderness.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Summary%20NFS%20roads%20fire%20paper%20-%202025.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 36 CFR 294 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2001-01-12/pdf/01-726.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/FY24-forest-system-stats.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/FY24-forest-system-stats.pdf)

happening across our national forests at American taxpayer expense. Forcing the rescission of this policy to allow more roads to be built is an irresponsible distraction and massive waste of taxpayer funding.

Beyond these realities, repeal is deeply unpopular<sup>5</sup>. More than 1.6 million comments were submitted in favor of the Roadless Rule – more than any other rulemaking in our nation’s history at the time it was adopted– and the rule has survived decades of attacks. This is precisely because millions of Americans are clear-eyed about the value of these protected ecosystems. These include anglers and hunters<sup>6</sup>, hikers<sup>7</sup>, tribal communities<sup>8</sup>, and so many more Americans who use and cherish our country’s incredible natural resources. That includes the outdoor recreation and tourism industry. A 2019 analysis of the economic values of roadless area conservation found that the recreational and passive uses of inventoried roadless areas yielded a total of nearly \$9 billion in economic benefits each year<sup>9</sup> – benefits our country and forest-adjacent communities cannot afford to lose.

The Roadless Rule keeps these wild ecosystems intact, sustaining critical habitats for threatened species such as native salmon populations that provide immense economic value in the Pacific Northwest and represent significant tribal cultural resources. In Alaska, the Tongass National Forest is the largest national forest, with 9 million acres of roadless areas and mature and old-growth rainforest, storing more than 1.5 billion metric tons of CO2-equivalent and sequestering 10 million metric tons a year. These forests protect clean drinking water for American communities, particularly rural communities which cannot afford to pay for drinking water infrastructure. They also serve as carbon sinks, making them an important tool in our work to address climate change, which agricultural producers depend on to sustain their businesses.

For over two decades, the Roadless Rule has served as dependable protection for some of our nation’s most valued public lands. We urge you to reverse course and retain full roadless protections for these 58.5 million acres.

Sincerely,



Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



Yassamin Ansari  
Member of Congress

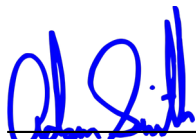
<sup>5</sup> [https://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/media/press-releases/what-they-are-actually-saying\\_and-what-the-trump-administration-is-ignoring-roadless-rule-rescission](https://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/media/press-releases/what-they-are-actually-saying_and-what-the-trump-administration-is-ignoring-roadless-rule-rescission)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.backcountryhunters.org/usda\\_rescinds\\_near\\_quarter\\_century\\_old\\_protections\\_for\\_58\\_5\\_million\\_acres\\_of\\_national\\_forest\\_land](https://www.backcountryhunters.org/usda_rescinds_near_quarter_century_old_protections_for_58_5_million_acres_of_national_forest_land)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.outdooralliance.org/blog/2025/6/24/usda-plans-to-rescind-the-roadless-rule-putting-backcountry-recreation-at-risk>

<sup>8</sup> <https://earthjustice.org/press/2024/alaska-native-tribes-southeast-alaska-businesses-and-forest-advocates-defend-tongass-national-forests-roadless-rule>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336444790\\_Economic\\_Values\\_and\\_Contributions\\_of\\_Roadless\\_Areas](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336444790_Economic_Values_and_Contributions_of_Roadless_Areas)



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Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



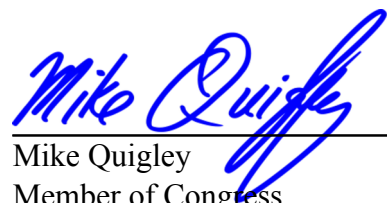
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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Kevin Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



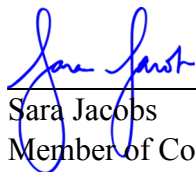
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Ed Case  
Member of Congress



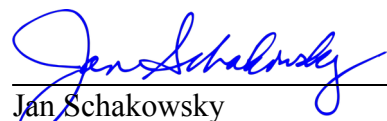
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



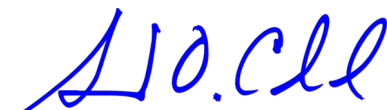
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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



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Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



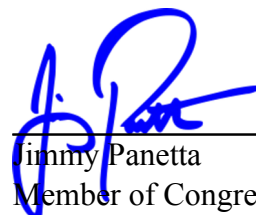
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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



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Jim Tokuda  
Member of Congress



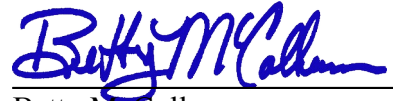
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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



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Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



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Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress



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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



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Cleo Fields  
Member of Congress



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Shri Thanedar  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Richard E. Neal  
Member of Congress



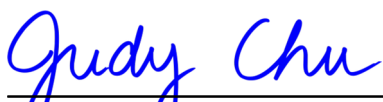
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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



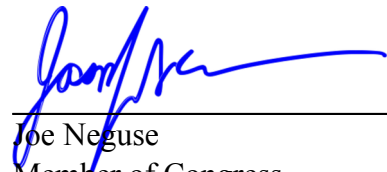
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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



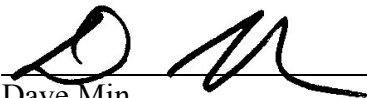
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Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



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Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



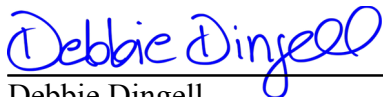
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Dave Min  
Member of Congress



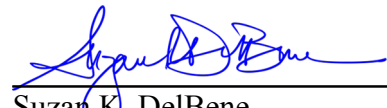
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Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress



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Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



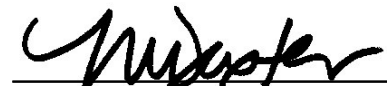
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Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress



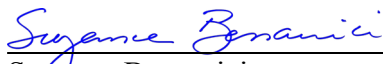
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Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



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Maxine Dexter  
Member of Congress



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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress