



GLOBE EDITORIAL

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## A reprieve for the trees

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GENTLEMEN, start your bulldozers. The race to the end of the Bush administration has begun for the US Forest Service, whose leaders have spent much of the past eight years trying to undo President Clinton's protection of one-third of national forest acreage as forever roadless. In New Hampshire, the service wants to log 300 acres of the Kilkenny area in the White Mountain National Forest that were classified as roadless after 2001. The project should be put on hold until the Forest Service gets new leadership under President-elect Barack Obama, who supports the Clinton roadless rule.

Kilkenny, one of the most isolated areas in the Northeast, is not a virgin forest untouched since the arrival of Europeans. But it has recovered from earlier timbering and now is home to moose, black bear, American marten, northern goshawk, and Canadian lynx. The area also includes a wild brook-trout fishery.

For logging to occur in the Kilkenny area, the Forest Service would have to restore disused roads that have become overgrown. Katherine Stuart, Forest Service district ranger for the Androscoggin district, says that timber sales proceeds in her area have exceeded the costs of road work and administration. But in many such projects, the government actually loses money.

With climate change forcing species to move northward or to higher elevations, conservationists say it is particularly important to protect intact, wild corridors that make this migration possible. Stuart says the cutting in Kilkenny would create an open habitat area for species that flourish in such areas and not in mature forests. She said she and her colleagues are not trying to rush the plan through before the change in administration and are prepared to work with new rules from Washington. Critics of the timbering say nearby open lands, including farms, already provide open habitat.

Such disagreements between the service and conservationists could become less heated if the service submitted its logging plans to third-party review by an organization like the Forest Stewardship Council.

The White Mountain National Forest isn't the only one to be facing last-minute actions. The former timber-industry lobbyist who oversees the Forest Service, Mark Rey, wanted to let a developer pave over rough national forest logging roads out West to improve access to residential subdivisions just outside forest areas. In the face of opposition from local officials, the developer has dropped its plan.

President Bush's attempt to reverse the Clinton roadless rule, which had won overwhelming support from the public before it took effect, began in the first weeks of his term. Obama should act quickly to reinstate the rule and ensure the Forest Service acts as steward of the national forests. ■

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