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Rep. Inslee supports Roadless Area Conservation review--but logging continues

by Jean Williams

Representative Jay Inslee (D-WA) announced today that he applauds the directive by Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack for a year-long review of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, but logging plans continue to move forward in some National Forests.

The roadless rule to conserve timber and old growth forests became policy in 2001, under the Clinton Administration. The rule immediately became bogged down in lawsuits and was kept buried by the Bush administration until today's development.

According to a report in the New York Times today, the Clinton-era rule only applies to 10 states because of a court decision late last year. California Magistrate Judge Elizabeth Laporte limited the rule to apply to New Mexico and the nine states covered by the 9th U.S.

Circuit Court of Appeals while lawsuits on the issue continue through the appeals process.

Laporte made the decision after the Bush administration asked both her and U.S. District Judge Clarence Brimmer in Wyoming to at least temporarily lift or modify their conflicting decisions on the rule, saying the Forest Service faced a "Hobbesian choice" over which of the court orders to disobey. Brimmer threw out the roadless rule in 2003,

Laporte reinstated it in 2006, and Brimmer threw it out again last year.

Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.), chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, also praised the move by Secretary Vilsack.

"This announcement is a major victory for our National Forests, and is proof positive that the new Administration is serious about turning the page on the legacy of the Bush Administration, which was bent on chopping away at the health and future of America's forests," Rahall said in a statement. "I see this one year time-out as a major step forward in protecting inventoried roadless areas across the country, but these wild forests need permanent protection to continue providing clean water, wildlife habitat, and boundless recreational opportunities."

However, the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) released a report today challenging the adequacy of Secretary Vilsack's directive. The operative word seems to be "inventoried", and protection only applies to roadless areas that were mapped before Clinton left office. As a result, timber sales, like the Steven Brooks sale, in the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire is still scheduled to go forward.



"The White Mountain National Forest is fixated on logging roadless areas in defiance of conservation science and the public will," said Mollie Matteson, conservation advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Roadless areas are critical ecological havens in an era of global warming. Plans to clearcut them demonstrate very acutely the need for strong, nationally consistent protection for all roadless areas."

Still, while the official quagmire is being reviewed and hashed out in court, for at least the next year, there will be 58 million acres of forest that can't be touched without Secretary Vilsack's approval.

Representative Inslee has reason to celebrate today's announcement, because he has spearheaded the battle to resurrect the Roadless Area Conservation Rule for years and recently sent a letter to Vilsack, with the support of 120 additional members of congress.

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