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### **Judge: Forest Service erred in wilderness studies**

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A federal judge ruled this week that plans for how Southern California's national forests can be developed did not take into account the importance of undeveloped wilderness areas.

In a suit brought by California officials and environmental groups, U.S. District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel ruled that the U.S. Forest Service "abused its discretion" when it failed to discuss the importance of such areas in its plans for the San Bernardino, Angeles, Cleveland and Los Padres national forests.

Environmental groups - including The Wilderness Society and the Center for Biological Diversity - complained that the Forest Service said 942,000 acres of roadless forest land could potentially be developed or opened to road construction.

The same plan set aside just 79,000 acres as potential wilderness - areas where motorized vehicles as well as roads and other developments are not permitted.

Hall Patel ruled that the plan did not take into account the overall importance of having wilderness areas.

The plan, she wrote, does not "specifically analyze the cumulative impact or overall consequences to the forests or the national forest unit of extensively increasing the (roadless areas) zoned to allow for potential road construction while recommending relatively few (roadless areas) for wilderness protection."

"If the larger picture is not addressed at this level, it never will be," she ruled, because other plans do not consider the "forests as a whole."

The lawsuits raised a host of complaints from environmental groups and state officials, but Hall Patel ruled in favor of the Forest Service in most parts of the case.