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Western reaction to Bush roadless rule

By The Associated Press

Reaction across the West to the Bush administration's decision Thursday to open up nearly a third of all remote national forest lands to road building, logging and other commercial ventures.

ALASKA:

"It's a hotly debated item, but what we're going to see out of this, I think, is an effort by this administration to balance the areas that don't have roads in them and allow other areas to have road access." _Alaska Gov. Frank Murkowski.

ARIZONA:

"It's a shame and one of the most striking things about the whole process is how dishonest it's been. ... The old plan helped to protect roadless areas in national forests. The new plan completely reverses protection for roadless areas. It's a wholesale abandonment of protection for roadless areas. Putting a fancy name on it does not change the facts." Erik Ryberg, a Southwest forest advocate for the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity.

"The Bush administration is focused on harming the national forests. Arizona forest is public land, and they don't belong to the timber industry or any one industry." _Sandy Bahr, a spokeswoman for the Sierra Club.

CALIFORNIA:

"We have no plans to build roads in the roadless areas of the national forests in California. ... Areas are roadless here for a reason." _Matt Mathes, regional spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

COLORADO:

"We're disappointed the way it's turned out, but we look forward to working with Gov. (Bill) Owens to save as much roadless land in Colorado as possible." _David Petersen, head of the roadless land program for Colorado's chapter of Trout Unlimited.

"Trees, wildlife, and fish don't respect state boundaries, and I don't think decisions about management of roadless areas _ or other parts of the national forests _ should be based on those lines, either," _Rep. Mark Udall, D-Colo., who also called the rules "a significant step backward."

IDAHO:

"We congratulate the Bush Administration for taking such a positive step toward resolving the roadless debate. This rule recognizes that a broad dictate over 60 million acres is simply unacceptable. By empowering states to offer suggestions on the management of roadless area in their states, the Forest Service can craft management plans to local conditions, reflecting local priorities while maintaining the lands for everyone." _Statement issued by Idaho's congressional delegation.

"We are extremely disappointed that the

new Bush plan fails to provide adequate protection for the last roadless areas in the country. These areas are some of the most important areas for fish and wildlife. They provide far and away the best hunting and fishing opportunities in the country." _Jonathan Oppenheimer of the Boise-based Idaho Conservation League.

MONTANA:

"It's a complete betrayal of the trust, the promises the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture made to keep our backcountry lands intact. ... Our hope is that the governor will prevent this senseless assault on Montana's heritage." _John Gatchell, conservation director with the Montana Wilderness Association

"The Bush administration has put subsidizing timber companies ahead of clean drinking water and wildlife habitat." _Michael Garrity, executive director of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies.

OREGON:

"This administration is not replacing or doing away with the Clinton rule. They're coming up with a process to protect and manage these important areas, because for the last couple years there has been no rule." _Chris West with Portland, Ore.-based American Forest Resource Council, who noted that in 2003 a federal judge ruled that the Clinton rule was illegal.

UTAH:

"I can't say that we're shocked given this administration, but this is really a travesty of a policy. In the course of the process that led to the roadless rule, about four million comments were collected and they were overwhelmingly in favor of protecting the land." _Heidi McIntosh, conservation director for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

WASHINGTON:

"The administration couldn't hear thunder in a quiet room. The public has said very clearly they want these areas protected. They are special places. People understand that pristine forests are unusual, they are rare, they are unique. "They have said by the millions that they want them protected." _Todd True with Seattle-based Earthjustice.

"We think it runs roughshod over the public's clearly voiced support for area protection. It completely gets rid of the safeguards for roadless areas that have been in place for the last five years and replaces it with a phony state-petition process that gives no guarantee that any roadless areas will be protected as the end result." _Mike Anderson with Wilderness Society's Seattle office.

WYOMING:

"I think it would really help a lot of these small communities that rely on it. ... We would like to see it for the plain and simple reason the town was very dependent on logging." _Mary Pigg, co-owner of RJR Logging in Saratoga, Wyo., which has not had any business for nearly years because the lack of logging forced area sawmills to close.