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## Trump administration proposes overhaul on environmental regulations managing federal forests

BY [REBECCA BEITSCH](#) - 06/12/19 04:18 PM EDT

A new proposed rule from the U.S. Forest Service designed to make environmental reviews more efficient would shortcut important oversight of industry plans, environmentalists say.

The rule comes after months of complaints by President Trump that the agency is mismanaging forests and not doing enough to prevent fires in California and other states.

Federal law requires an environmental review for projects on federal land, but exceptions are granted if industry can show it would not severely impact the environment. The Forest Service proposal would expand the types of exceptions for skipping the review process.

"The Agency proposes these revisions to increase efficiency in its environmental analysis," the Forest Service wrote in the rule, while "fully honoring its environmental stewardship responsibilities."

The proposal follows an executive order from late last year widely viewed as an attempt to increase logging on federal lands.

Environmentalists say letting industry skip the environmental review process would eliminate the mechanism communities and citizens have to express concerns over nearby projects.

"The Trump administration is trying to stifle the public's voice and hide environmental damage to public lands," Ted Zukoski, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement. "These rules would let the Forest Service sidestep bedrock environmental laws. Logging companies could bulldoze hundreds of miles of new roads and chainsaw miles of national forests while ignoring the damage to wildlife and waterways. All of this would happen without involving nearby communities or forest visitors."

Vicki Christiansen, chief of the Forest Service, told NPR that current regulations are more thorough than is needed.

"We do more analysis than we need, we take more time than we need and we slow down important work to protect communities," Christiansen said.

The Forest Service did not immediately respond to The Hill's request for comment.

Environmental groups say the rule would not protect communities because it excludes them from participating in the process.

The exceptions to environmental review include some logging if the Forest Service has determined such efforts would be restorative to forests, but critics say there would be no review of the agency's decision beforehand.

"The public may only know after the fact when the Forest Service has already made a decision," Randi Spivak, director of public lands for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Spivak is also concerned about a provision that would allow five miles of road to be built through federal land without an environmental review. There are not exceptions though, to how many times that provision could be used.

"Some might say, 'Oh it's five miles here, five miles there.' But go ahead and multiply this by 100, by 1,000, and that's one of the reasons why this rule so concerning," Spivak said.

Trump has repeatedly chided the Forest Service for how it manages lands, renewing that sentiment in a speech last night in Iowa.

"You can't let 15 and 20 years of leaves and broken trees and dead wood that after the first 18 months is dry as a bone. You can't let that be there, you have to clean it. You have to clean those floors of the forest and you're going to see a big difference," Trump said.

The proposed rule would limit environmental review for things like prescribed burns, something Spivak said is often needed.

"That's not what this is about," she said. "This rule is about cutting out the public to increase logging, road building and perhaps mining on public lands."

The public has 60 days to comment on the proposed rule.