



The Conservation Alliance

Outdoor Business Giving Back to the Outdoors

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Protection of the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As companies that make and sell products for recreating in the outdoors, we strongly oppose recent proposals to exempt National Forests in Utah and Alaska from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule). National Forest roadless areas – including 4 million acres in Utah and 9.3 million acres in Alaska’s Tongass National Forest – provide some of the finest outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States. Millions of people enjoy hiking, biking, camping, hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities in the scenic backcountry of the National Forests every year.

The recreational uses and values of roadless areas and other public lands serve as the backbone of the United States’ growing outdoor recreation economy. According to a study conducted by the Outdoor Industry Association, our industry generates \$887 billion in annual consumer spending, creates 7.6 million jobs, and brings in \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue. Public land policies like the Roadless Rule are essential to the continued health of the industry and the communities that rely on it.

Adopted in 2001 after one of the most extensive public involvement processes in the history of federal rulemaking, the Roadless Rule protected 58.5 million acres of roadless areas from harmful road building and commercial logging. More than 1.7 million people commented during the 2001 rulemaking process, of which the vast majority favored strong roadless area protection. A recent public opinion poll conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that 75 percent of the public support the Roadless Rule, with rural and urban residents equally supportive.

The stakes are high for the outdoor recreation industry in Utah and Alaska. The Outdoor Alliance estimates that Utah’s proposal would roll back or eliminate protections for roughly 80 percent of currently protected areas in Utah for backcountry skiing, paddling, hiking, and mountain biking. Likewise, Alaska’s tourism industry depends on the Tongass’ continued scenic wildness and thriving wildlife, qualities that make the Tongass unique in the world and attractive to global visitors. In 2013, the Forest Service estimated that Southeast Alaska’s visitor industry employed 6,707 people and accounted for 15 percent of total regional employment.

The Roadless Rule has provided effective protection for wildland recreational opportunities for nearly two decades. Exempting Utah or Alaska from this important national policy would irreparably damage roadless areas and recreational values in those states and set a bad precedent for reducing roadless area protection elsewhere. We respectfully ask that you take no action to eliminate or loosen Roadless Rule safeguards in Utah or Alaska. Please uphold the Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,

The Conservation Alliance