

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

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Pristine U.S. Forest Areas Can Be Protected

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Hope for Wild National Forests

Finalized in January 2001, the federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule is the most significant U.S. forest conservation measure of the last 100 years. It protects approximately 58.5 million acres of wild, pristine national forest lands. These areas are vital sources of clean water; quality recreation; and native fish and wildlife habitat, including important habitat for endangered species.

We have about 190 million acres of national forests in the U.S. Over half of these have been seriously affected by logging, mining, road building, and other ecologically damaging activities. Moreover, national forests contain nine times more miles of roads than the interstate highway system.

Under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the most unspoiled national forest areas will be protected from such degradation, including roadless areas in Alaska's Tongass National Forest, the largest remaining temperate rainforest in the world. The roadless rule spares inventoried roadless areas of 5000 acres or more from new road construction, most forms of logging, new oil and gas leases, and mineral development.

Public and Faith Community Support

The protection of national forest roadless areas has garnered a great deal of public support. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is the most commented on federal rule in our nation's history—over 1.6 million Americans submitted public comments on this policy. The vast majority of these were in support of a strong policy of protection. In addition, in 1999 and 2000 the Forest Service held over 600 public meetings on this policy, including several in national forests.

There has also been significant support from the religious community for a strong roadless rule. Speaking in whole or part

from their faith perspective, individuals from all over the country have written letters and testified in support of a strong roadless policy. For example, as the Clinton-Gore Administration was finalizing the roadless rule, over 2000 individuals and organizational leaders, including FCUN and many Quakers, signed a letter to President Clinton and Vice President Gore “[a]s members of communities of faith . . . called to care for God’s creation.” Similar religious community group

letters were written in 1999 and 2001. This is fully in keeping with the Quaker Eco Witness Guidance Statement on Policy that calls for us to “[l]imit the amount of land we exploit for human purposes so as to preserve Earth’s biological diversity and productivity.”

Other Impacts

Because it protects remaining national forest wild spaces and safeguards increasingly rare habitat and clean water, implementation of the roadless rule would make a

big difference ecologically. Yet it is quite moderate in its other impacts. For example, this rule affects only 0.2 percent of all national domestic timber production and only 4 percent of timber production on National Forest lands. Moreover, the effect on natural gas production is expected to be very small because the entire National Forest System only accounts for 0.4 percent of all domestic production. New road construction necessary for public health and safety is permitted. And logging is permitted for forest health reasons, such as restoration of ecosystem composition and structure to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires.

In addition, the roadless rule could provide an economic boon in places. A study by researchers at Colorado State University found that keeping some of the areas roadless would result in economic benefits valued at over \$2 billion. Five hundred million of this is in clean water for cities and reduced need for water filtration systems.

“The instruction to care for creation is found in Scripture as well as other religious and ethical teachings. The earth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1, Leviticus 25:23, Isaiah 41:20), and God has declared that the totality of creation is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). We are tenants called “to till and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15). . . . Moreover, it is often in wild places, such as pristine forests, that we encounter creation’s sheer magnificence. There, in awe and serenity, our hearts turn to God. We praise God for all the goodness we have received; we are “glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things” (Joel 2:21). It would be sad to deny to future generations wild forest areas that offer this opportunity for spiritual sustenance and growth.” July, 2000, letter to the Administration signed by approximately 2000 members of the U.S. religious community.

Attempts to Weaken Roadless Protections

Considering the benefits offered by a fully implemented roadless rule, it is hard to understand why government leaders would oppose the policy. However, the Bush Administration is moving in this unfortunate direction. Existing national forest logging, road building, and other ecologically damaging activities have occurred under a forest-by-forest decision-making process. The Bush Administration has indicated that it wishes vital roadless areas to continue to be subject to this forest-by-forest decision-making instead of the nationwide protections contained in the roadless rule. These pristine places are too precious to be subject to local industrial pressures without an extra blanket of protection. This is what the roadless rule as finalized in January 2001 provides. The roadless rule does not disrupt forest-by-forest decision-making for national forests overall, but provides an extra layer of protection for the most wild parts of these forests.

“Intact forests play an important role in the function of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. They are spared the often-massive soil erosion that typically accompanies road building and logging, which fouls streams and rivers. As a result, roadless areas in our national forests contain some of the most intact aquatic ecosystems in the country, including some of the healthiest salmon stocks. Intact forests provide direct watershed benefits to people by reducing flood threats and supplying clean sources of drinking water. . . . In order to preserve these important ecological benefits, as well as the immeasurable aesthetic and recreational value of the remaining undeveloped 30% of our national forests (an area that represents only 2% of the country’s land area), we urge you to implement and vigorously administer the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Thank you for considering our views on this matter of vital importance to the nation’s ecological health.” *Excerpt from May, 2001, letter to President Bush from about 300 scientists.*

What Friends Can Do

The roadless rule finalized in January 2001 is strong because people, including individuals speaking from a faith perspective, told their public officials they wanted a strong policy. Now we need to urge our government leaders to leave the Roadless Area Conservation Rule alone and implement it as soon as possible.

Friends can make a difference by writing their members of Congress in support of the strong Roadless Area Conservation Rule as finalized in January 2001. The Bush Administration must have public comment periods before it can change the roadless rule. (The first comment period ends September 10, 2001; at least one more is expected.) During these comment periods, which are announced, Friends can submit comments and encourage others to do the same.

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Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly as an insert in *BeFriending Creation* by **Quaker Eco-Witness**, a project of **Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN)**.

Quaker Eco-Witness (QEW) will promote US government and corporate policies to help restore and protect Earth’s biological integrity. It will work within and through the Religious Society of Friends for policies that enable human communities to relate in mutually enhancing ways to the ecosystems of which they are a part. This witness will seek to be guided by the Spirit and grounded in reverence for Earth’s communities of life as God’s creation.

QEB’s purpose is to inform the **QEW** network to advance Friends’ witness on government and corporate policy as it relates to the ecosystems that sustains us. Each issue is an article about timely legislative or corporate policy issues affecting our society’s relationship to the earth.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for *QEB*. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Provide background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Explain why the issue is a Friends’ concern.
- Describe the positions of other faith-based and secular environmental groups on the issue.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- Provide sources for additional information.

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