



# WILD VIRGINIA

Protecting your favorite wild places

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## **WILD VIRGINIA VOWS FIGHT OVER ROADLESS AREAS**

Charlottesville, VA - Today the Bush administration announced its repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule on America's National Forests. The original rule protected nearly 60 million acres of public forests, leaving two-thirds of the Forests unprotected. There are almost 400,000 acres of "inventoried" roadless areas here in Virginia, about a quarter of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

"These special wild places should be left alone for hunters, anglers and wildlife, and not handed over to the timber and mining interests at the expense of the taxpayer," said Wild Virginia Conservation Director Steve Krichbaum.

"These roadless tracts are the last intact wild places we have left that haven't been cut down and sliced up with logging equipment and roads. Now the Bush administration is putting them back on the chopping block," continued Krichbaum.

The original 2001 federal rule protected inventoried roadless areas from most logging and road building. It protected vital and irreplaceable sources of drinking water, rare species, wildlife habitat, and recreational lands. It provided access for camping, hiking, bird watching, hunting, and fishing while allowing for fire fighting and prevention to occur. It was a fair and balanced measure that was scientifically based as well as responsive to the public's desires. Virginia's Senator John Warner (R) introduced legislation to turn the Conservation Rule into law.

The roadless rule was put in place after over 600 hundred public hearings and the preparation of a full Environmental Impact Statement with hundreds of pages of disclosure and analysis. The process resulted in the greatest outpouring of public participation in federal rulemaking in American history. Four million comments were submitted at various times, with an overwhelming percentage in favor of strict protection for National Forest roadless areas. Three public hearings were held in Virginia and over the years 93,000 comments were received. Of the Virginians responding, 98% are in favor of protecting roadless areas.

"The Bush Administration's cancellation of this policy took place without any public hearings. The repeal was accomplished without an EIS, without the scientific analysis and public involvement process that preparation of such a document requires. It seems Bush feels his 52% election victory was a "mandate," but when 95% of Americans support conservation of roadless areas, they can be ignored in favor of his friend in big business. Virginians who want these areas protected should contact Congress and join groups like Wild Virginia now, because this is it, the last fight for the roadless forests," continued Krichbaum.

The new rule sets up a state-by-state petitioning process. Governors can petition the feds to protect all, some, or no roadless areas. And any petitions can be denied by the administration. Mark Warner announced his opposition to the Bush Administration's repeal of the Rule.

“Over the years, the Forest Service has proven itself incapable of protecting wild lands. That is the very reason that people fought for decades to get the Wilderness Act passed. And it is the very reason that now national protection of the remaining roadless areas is needed. The Forest Service has continually whittled away at roadless areas. And all along the way, they mislead the public by claiming they were protecting most of the roadless acreage.

Analysis by Wild Virginia shows how the US Forest Service treats wild lands. For example, the Big Schloss roadless area on Virginia’s George Washington National Forest is a perfect example. In the ‘70s it was inventoried by the Forest Service at roughly 38,000 acres. Now it is 21,000. Or the Big Stony roadless area on the Jefferson National Forest—it was 4,200 acres when first inventoried in the ‘70s. It was eliminated by the early 1990s, after 13 miles of roads had been built into the area in a series of projects.

“America’s last wild places deserve a lot better than more logging and roads from George Bush. It isn’t right and we will fight this until reason and fairness prevail and our natural heritage is secure,” said Wild Virginia President Jennifer Creasy.

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*Wild Virginia is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to preserving wild forest ecosystems in Virginia's National Forests. [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)*