



Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education

April 27, 2006

Joanna Prukop
Secretary
New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural
Resources Department

Dear Secretary Prukop:

I am submitting this letter on behalf of the New Mexico Chapter of the Wildlife Society in support of the petition being filed by the State of New Mexico to protect 1.6 million acres of roadless national forests within the state. The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule prohibited most commercial logging and road building on 58.5 million acres of U.S. national forest lands. The Rule as legislated was a significant first step in preserving the diverse plant and wildlife communities protected in these roadless areas.

The Chapter believes that protection of these roadless areas is both fiscally and scientifically justified. Roadless natural areas in New Mexico protect vital watersheds and the water quality benefits contribute to sustaining the New Mexico economy. Disturbance associated with road construction and associated logging activities have been documented as the primary human-caused source of soil and water disturbances and degradation in forested environments (Patric 1976, Egan et al. 1996, Anderson et al. 1976). Surveys conducted by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Alliance in 1999 found that 86% of anglers and 83% of hunters surveyed support a policy to prevent future road building in roadless areas (TRCA 1999). These hunters and anglers highly valued many attributes of roadless Forest Service lands, including the habitat they provide for endangered species, the protection of water quality, and the opportunity to hunt, fish and experience solitude in remote places with few roads and people. Revenues from the sale of licenses, permits, and hunting and fishing equipment contribute significantly to the New Mexico economy and may be critical in financially supporting more rural communities. Degraded water and soil quality from roads adversely affect salmonid fish species and their habitats (Furniss et al. 1991). Numerous studies have documented the negative impacts roads have on deer, elk and other big game, with roadless areas providing better quality habitat to support larger wildlife populations (Thiessen 1976). In addition, roadless areas provide refuge for wildlife populations (Wray 1990) and reduce the opportunities for illegal hunting and fishing activities (Lyon and Vasile 1980). Roadless areas are also cherished by hiking, bird watching and other outdoor enthusiasts that spend millions of dollars annually on recreational equipment, and contribute to rural economies through ecotourist activities. Thus, roadless areas contribute to the economy by providing sustainable high quality recreational opportunities.

The Chapter also believes that roadless areas are essential to reduce forest fragmentation and help conserve habitat for rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species. Roads can provide a conduit for invasive species that can threaten native plant and animal communities (Parendes and Jones 2000). At a recent presentation in Albuquerque, Dale Bosworth, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service stated that the greatest current threat to National Forests was the encroachment of urban development. The development of roads not only fragments our natural areas but may also contribute to further developmental encroachment on the perimeter of roadless areas. As our protected areas are surrounded by intensive urban and agricultural development they begin to function as islands. The more remote and the smaller the size of these protected areas, the greater the potential loss of species, a concept known as island biogeography first developed by E.O. Wilson and R.H. MacArthur. Roadless areas are also critical to large predators and their survival may be the foundation for restoring large connected natural areas and preserving biodiversity, a concept being promoted in the recent advance of conservation biology and planning (Noss et al. 1997).

A growing body of scientific literature identifies the potential adverse impacts of roads on native species in aquatic and terrestrial habitats, and clearly identifies the need for large contiguous tracts of unfragmented habitats to maintain species population viability. The Chapter recognizes that some roads are necessary for management and other compatible access. However, roadless areas comprise only 2% of the New Mexico landscape and are critical in preserving the character and integrity of our natural heritage. Therefore, the Chapter strongly supports the Governor and the State of New Mexico's petition to the Federal Government for the preservation of this roadless acreage.

Sincerely,

Pete David
President
New Mexico Chapter of the Wildlife Society

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