



August 21, 2026

Secretary, Brooke Rollins
Acting Director of Ecosystem Management Coordination, Joshua White
US Department of Agriculture

Docket ID: RIN 0596-AD66

Title: Keep the 2001 Roadless Rule Intact!

For over 50 years, Friends of Plumas Wilderness has worked to protect the uniquely beautiful and biodiverse public lands and waters of the Upper Feather River Watershed. As a local and grassroots organization, we and our supporters have seen firsthand how catastrophic wildfires impact our communities. The Plumas National Forest is already heavily roaded due to its extensive logging and mining history. In fact, the Forest Service is already tasked with maintaining nearly 4,500 miles of off-highway access roads. This leaves only 6% of the total forest area designated in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA's). Rescinding protections on these remaining 65,000 acres will not solve our wildfire crisis. Instead, bringing roads into these steep, untouched backcountry zones will dramatically increase the risks of human-caused ignition right in our backyard.

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposal to rescind the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Stripping nationwide protections from 45 million acres of National Forest System lands ignores established forest ecology and is a myopic and opportunistic reactionary action that will not solve the problems it is purported to resolve. Instead, it will create a myriad of new problems that will degrade, monetize, and forever change the wilderness character of our most precious public lands. We strongly urge the U.S. Forest Service to maintain the 2001 Rule.

Rescinding this rule will **increase wildfire ignition risks**. While proponents argue road construction aids fire mitigation, spatial fire science consistently shows that roads introduce human-caused ignitions—the source of roughly 90% of all wildfires in California. Introducing roads into currently intact backcountry areas significantly elevates the risk of accidental fires from vehicle use, equipment, and public access, endangering nearby communities. The 2001 Roadless Rule already contains exceptions that allow for fire suppression and public safety emergency responses. The



Roadless Rule does **not** ban the construction of temporary roads and fuel treatment projects when and where they're needed. It allows management activities that reduce the threat of severe wildfire, restore ecosystems, protect endangered species, and address public-safety concerns.

Rescinding this rule will **degrade critical watersheds**. Independent research, including a July 2026 University of Washington study, confirms that IRA's protect 80,000 miles of rivers nationally, providing pristine trout and salmon streams and critical wildlife habitat, as well as safeguarding clean drinking water. Road construction causes severe soil erosion and sediment runoff. This runoff degrades water quality, threatens aquatic habitats, and directly increases water treatment costs for downstream municipalities. The Upper Feather River Watershed serves as a natural filtration system, purifying water for the multitude of uses that require it. It is the primary headwaters for the California State Water Project, supplying clean drinking water to over 27 million Californians and agricultural irrigation to 750,000 acres of farmland.

Rescinding this rule will cause the **loss of vital carbon sinks**. Mature, unfragmented forests within IRA's are highly effective at capturing and storing carbon. Allowing logging and road fragmentation in these high-integrity ecosystems undermines federal climate mitigation goals by releasing stored carbon and reducing the forest's future carbon-sequestration capacity.

Rescinding this rule will cause **increased habitat fragmentation and the loss of biodiversity**. Roads slice through critical wildlife corridors, fragmenting the continuous habitat that vulnerable species, such as our local mule deer, rely upon for survival and migration. Preserving large, contiguous blocks of forest is essential for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, especially under changing climate conditions. Particularly at risk in our region are the endemic and endangered Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog that rely on alpine lakes and meadows, and the elusive Pacific Fisher, an old-growth tree-dwelling carnivorous mammal. In fact, the USFS Draft Environmental Impact Statement suggests that a total repeal of the rule would likely adversely affect 327 ESA listed threatened and endangered species.

Rescinding this rule will **harmfully affect the local recreation industry** that helps to sustain local small businesses and rural economies. Small towns located within Plumas County are dependent on tourists and recreationists that come to enjoy hiking, biking, fishing, rafting, and other quiet recreational activities provided by our wild public lands. Outdoor recreation tourism is the primary private-sector driver of Plumas County's economy.

Rescinding this rule is an opportunistic overreach that prioritizes extractive industries at the expense of clean water, community safety and wellness, and ecosystem integrity. Public lands within



Inventoried Roadless Areas have irreplaceable ecological and recreational value and must remain protected. Please maintain the nationwide protections of the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,

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