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USDA MOVES FORWARD TO PROTECT ROADLESS AREAS

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 6, 2001 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced that it is moving forward in an open and fair process to develop protections for roadless areas.

Through an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR), USDA will seek a sixty day public comment period to help determine the next steps in providing long-term protection of roadless areas. The ANPR--available for inspection at the Federal Register today--lists several questions for the public to consider regarding roadless area values and future protection and management of inventoried roadless areas in national forests and grasslands.

“This public comment period is an effort to be responsive to the concerns raised by local communities, states, tribes and other stakeholders,” said USDA Forest Chief Dale Bosworth. “It is important to give people additional time to express their views on how best to move this process forward. If we spend the extra time now, we have a better chance of coming up with a workable solution that has the support, commitment and understanding of the American people.”

Of the 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas, less than two tenths of one percent might be considered for road construction during the next five years, after appropriate environmental review and documentation. Eighty four percent of inventoried roadless areas are not managed for timber production and forty one percent prohibit road construction.

USDA is taking a pro-active stance during this period to solicit additional public comment and review the existing rule to determine how best to adhere to the five guiding principles of informed decision-making that were outlined on May 4, 2001. These principles are as follows: informed decision-making; working together with local input and information; protecting forests; protecting communities, homes, and property; and protecting access to property.

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule designated nearly 60 million acres in national forests off-limits to roadbuilding, most logging and other development requiring roads. On May 4th, USDA announced that the roadless rule would be implemented, but with adjustments to be made to the rule. However, on May 10th, a federal judge in Idaho preliminarily enjoined the rule. Seven other lawsuits against the rule are currently pending. On June 7th the Chief of the Forest Service issued interim protections for roadless areas by requiring his approval of any proposed road building and timber harvesting in these areas.

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