

March 31, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Measures Needed to Ensure Roadless Area Conservation

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As dedicated users of America's national forest roadless areas, we ask that you issue a directive requiring secretarial-level review for all projects within inventoried roadless areas until more permanent protections can be implemented.

Our organizations represent diverse groups of public-lands users, including hikers, mountain bikers, climbers, paddlers, backcountry skiers, hunters and anglers. We are unified by a common conservation and stewardship ethic and by the value we place on the current unroaded condition of our national forest roadless areas. We request that you lead the Department of Agriculture in taking immediate steps to ensure that America's valuable backcountry national forests are conserved into the long-term future.

As you know, our nation's public lands encompass almost 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands, including approximately 58.5 million acres of "inventoried roadless areas," or backcountry. These areas provide high-quality outdoor opportunities to the millions of Americans who recreate on our public lands and contribute to the \$796 billion generated annually across the country by the human powered recreation and hunting and fishing industries.

Responsible roadless area management is a catalyst that has united the interests of our diverse groups. The human-powered recreation community and the sportsmen's community enjoy different activities on public lands, yet collectively we understand the significance of America's public lands in securing our outdoor traditions. Specifically, we agree that our national forest roadless areas are an important resource that must be conserved.

The scenic and recreational qualities of roadless areas help guarantee high-quality human-powered outdoor experiences. Trails, waterways, slopes, scenic vistas and opportunities for solitude found on these lands provide unparalleled opportunities for activities that refresh the body and reinvigorate the mind. New roads in the backcountry could degrade the experiences users have come to expect on our public lands.

National forest roadless areas also are important to maintaining exceptional public-lands hunting and fishing. In addition to their key role in sustaining America's sporting legacy,

roadless lands are home to many of our fish and wildlife populations, where big-game animals like elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep can thrive. New roads in these areas could impair this vital habitat, resulting in reduced hiding cover for big game, shorter hunting seasons and decreased hunter opportunity. Too many roads also could diminish the quality of fish spawning habitat, curtailing opportunities for anglers.

We believe your decisive leadership on responsible roadless area management will help assure the conservation of America's backcountry so that recreationists of many backgrounds can continue enjoying these treasured public lands now and into the future. We thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to continued opportunities to work with you and your staff in attaining these goals.

Respectfully,

George Cooper, President & CEO
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Frank Hugelmeyer, President & CEO
Outdoor Industry Association

Mark Singleton, Chairman
Outdoor Alliance