

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Suite 200-A
Washington, D.C. 20250

April 6, 2010

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We want to thank you for your strong and public commitment to uphold the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule against court challenges from its opponents. With the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on record in support of the rule, we are pleased that the Obama administration is currently defending it in the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, where it has been challenged by the mining industry, among others.

However, we are concerned that even while the Obama administration is defending the rule in the Tenth Circuit, it has taken several actions in states such as Alaska, Colorado and Oregon that would appear to contradict this position. In particular, we are troubled by the administration's recent decision to allow Oxbow Mining Company and Arch Coal to begin the regulatory process to expand their operations into inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) in Colorado. Both corporations have vigorously opposed the rule since its inception and have been aggressive in seeking to circumvent its protections through an alternative proposal the state is advancing.

Given the Obama administration's strong support for roadless protection, we ask that you and the Forest Service not approve any activities in conjunction with the Oxbow and Arch Coal mine expansions that would violate the 2001 rule. In this spirit, we also ask that you commit that no future road construction will occur in Colorado IRAs to facilitate the expansion of these mines or any development of other industrial scale projects, including those that involve logging, mining, and drilling.

The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule is the product of more than three decades of exhaustive public debate, years of scientific review and a federal rulemaking in which a record number of Americans participated. With more than half of our National Forests already open to logging, mining and drilling, the rule was intended as a balanced approach to preserve the last third of undeveloped forestland as habitat for wildlife, a haven for recreation, a source of clean drinking water, and a heritage for future generations.

When it comes to America's forests, the Obama administration has a tremendous opportunity to continue the stewardship legacy of President Theodore Roosevelt and ensure these wild landscapes are preserved for future generations. We thank you again for your commitment to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and we look forward to working together to make certain that all 58.6 million acres of our last wild national forests benefit from this landmark policy's full protection.

Sincerely,

Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists
American Canoe Association
American Hiking Society
American Whitewater
International Mountain Bicycling Association
League of Conservation Voters
Outdoor Alliance

Pew Environment Group
Restoring Eden, Christians for Environmental Stewardship
Sierra Club
The Access Fund
The Noah Alliance
The World Stewardship Institute
Winter Wildlands Alliance
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Cascadia Wildlands
Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition
Southern Environmental Law Center
Wild South
WildEarth Guardians
Arkansas Canoe Club
Arkansas Chapter of the Sierra Club
Arkansas Nature Alliance
Ecological Conservation Organization
The Ozark Society
Arizona Wilderness Coalition
Sky Island Alliance
California Oaks
California Wilderness Coalition
Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
Environment Now
Environmental Defense Center
Forest Issues Group
Forests Forever
Orange County Interfaith Coalition for the Environment
Resource Stewardship Task Force, Point Loma Nazarene University
The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Wilderness Workshop
Gulf Coast Conservancy
Friends of Georgia, Inc
Georgia ForestWatch
Iowa Environmental Council
Friends of the Clearwater
Hoosier Environmental Council
Friends of the Boundary Waters
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club
Wildlands CPR
Western North Carolina Alliance
Amigos Bravos
Audubon New Mexico
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Nevada Conservation League
Buckeye Forest Council
Ohio Environmental Council
Audubon Society of Portland

Coast Range Association
Hells Canyon Preservation Council
Oregon Council, Trout Unlimited
Oregon Wild
Siskiyou Project
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
Umpqua Watersheds
South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
Cherokee Forest Voices
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Utah Environmental Congress
The Clinch Coalition
Virginia Wilderness Committee
Wild Virginia
Admiralty Audubon
Alpine Lakes Protection Society
Earth Ministry
El Sendero-NCW Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
Gifford Pinchot Task Force
Grays Harbor Audubon Society
Issaquah Alps Trails Club
Kittitas Audubon
Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society
Middle Fork Outdoor Recreation Coalition
Mt Baker Wild!
Nooksack Recovery Team
North Cascades Audubon
North Cascades Conservation Council
Olympic Forest Coalition
Olympic Park Associates
Skagit Alpine Club
Skagit Audubon Society
Spokane Audubon Society
The Lands Council
Washington Alpine Club
Washington Association of Churches
Washington Wilderness Coalition
Whidbey Environmental Action Network
Willapa Hills Audubon Society
For the Woods
Friends of Blackwater
Wyoming Conservation Voters

Cc: Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, USDA
Robert Bonnie, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, USDA
Tom Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service