

**“*[B]reak forth into singing, O mountains,  
O forest, and every tree in it!*” Isaiah 44: 23.**

April 30, 2001

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

As leaders and members of the U.S. faith community, we view caring for God's creation as an important moral and religious obligation. We also view protection of the environment as a responsibility shared by all. We urge you to exercise this responsibility by implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Policy immediately and by vigorously defending it in court.

Many members of the religious community played a significant role in urging development of this strong policy to protect the undeveloped areas of our national forests. We were there in hearings, letters, and prayers. We have rejoiced at the prospect of protecting 58.5 million acres of some of our nation's most pristine forests.

These forests are important for a number of reasons. We believe we have a sacred obligation to protect the marvelous world God has given us, including its life-giving waters and myriad of plant and animal species. National forests provide important, even crucial, habitat for several U.S. species, and the condition of our national forests affects the purity of many communities' streams and rivers.

We also have an obligation because, as the Scriptures tell us, the earth is not ours, but God's: "The Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 24:1-2). We are tenants charged with creation's watchful care, instructed to "keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15). As God told the Israelites, "the land is mine, and you . . . have become my tenants" (Leviticus 25:23).

In addition, wild forest areas testify to God's glory, revealing a part of the entirety of creation that God has declared "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Perhaps that is one reason why walking in a pristine national forest sometimes brings us into closer communion with God. Whether contemplating the small climbing vine or the gigantic tree, we are reminded once again that "the Lord has done great things!" (Joel 2:21).

We cannot ignore the destruction of intact forest ecosystems, which threatens to rob our children of the natural inheritance with which we have been blessed. Almost half the acreage in our national forests already has been seriously degraded through road building, logging, mining, and other activities. The 58.5 million acres of wild forest protected by the roadless policy is a little less than one-third of our national forest land. Surely we as a nation can have the strength and resolve to safeguard this area that still remains relatively whole.

In this season of celebration for many faith traditions, we are reaching out to you in hope. Let us together be humble in the face of God and God's creation. Let us protect the

remnants of wild creation while we still can, for the sake of our faith, our children, future generations, and God's myriad creatures. The roadless policy gives us all a wonderful opportunity to join together to protect these critical wild areas. We hope and pray that you will, on behalf of us all, take this opportunity fully.

Sincerely,

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Director  
Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies

Rabbi Warren Gerald Stone  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Chair, Environmental Committee

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