



**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR**

October 6, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Roadless Area Conservation Rule Rescission – DEIS & Proposed Rule

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Schultz:

I write in support of the U.S. Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("Roadless Rule") and in opposition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposal for rescission. North Carolina works to protect and conserve the unique natural resources of our state, and this proposed rescission is counter to ongoing state, local, and Tribal-led efforts to preserve the natural beauty that defines our landscapes and protect the ecosystems that provide our drinking water.

Since its adoption in 2001, the Roadless Rule has served as a cornerstone of public lands conservation and now protects nearly 45 million acres of National Forest System lands across 37 states. Roadless areas house some of the few remaining tracts of intact and largely undeveloped forestland in the nation.

The Roadless Rule protects more than 172,000 acres of National Forest System lands within North Carolina from unnecessary road construction and timber harvesting activities while providing premier hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor opportunities. Rescission of the Roadless Rule threatens to undermine the important outdoor recreation economy of North Carolina.

Economic Impact

Eliminating the Roadless Rule would degrade recreation areas that millions of North Carolina residents and visitors from around the world enjoy every year.

Roadless areas bring dollars: Roadless areas like Laurel Mountain and South Mills River are the core areas for western North Carolina's thriving mountain bike economy.

Fishing and paddling benefit: Additionally, streams like Wilson Creek, North and South Mills River, Fires Creek, Curtis Creek, the South Toe River, Armstrong Creek, the Laurel River, Wesser Creek, Overflow Creek, Snowbird Creek, the Upper Nantahala, and many more run clean and cold because their watersheds have roadless protection. These are some of our most iconic trout streams, and many of them are also important whitewater paddling streams.

Clean water spawns fishing ROI: North Carolina's investment in trout fisheries through its hatchery program, education, and DWR's permitting program pays off big for WNC, supporting an industry that contributes \$1.38 billion annually to our economy.

Water Quality

This move to add roads also threatens drinking water sources for 60 million people across 33 states, including North Carolina, and would cost taxpayers billions in logging subsidies and road maintenance costs.

Roadless saves money: Clean water in streams translates directly to savings at the tap. Treating drinking water that has been contaminated by sediment is a major expense, especially for smaller communities.

Millions of people benefit: From communities like Hendersonville that draw their water directly from roadless watersheds to downstream cities like Charlotte, roadless areas provide clean water that is invaluable to more than 2 million North Carolinians.

Staffing Shortages and Disaster Risk

Rescinding the Roadless Rule and adding roads on National Forest Lands threatens to exacerbate the U.S. Forest Service's \$8 billion infrastructure maintenance backlog at a time North Carolina is working to adjust to 10% cuts to U.S. Forest Service staffing and the proposed reduction of the National Forest management budget by 25% in FY2027.

Staffing is already reduced: As past reorganization at the Bureau of Land Management demonstrates, and as USDA analysis of public comments on the proposal concludes, the U.S. Forest Service restructuring is also likely to further decrease staffing.

Landslide danger rises, too: Roads are also the biggest risk factor that we can control in whether and where landslides occur. Most landslides during Hurricane Helene began where roads cut across steep slopes. Building roads into roadless watersheds would make WNC less resilient, not more.

Public Support

Public support for the Roadless Rule has remained nonpartisan and unwavering over the past 25 years.

2001 brought strong support: When the 2001 Roadless Rule was proposed, Forest Service received 1.6 million public comments – more than 90 percent in support of Roadless Area conservation. This was the result of robust comment periods and hundreds of public meetings.

People now are not having their say: In contrast, the current rescission effort has lacked meaningful public engagement. The agency provided a mere 21 days for public comment on the Notice of Intent in 2025 and has yet to hold any comparable public meetings.

More comment time is needed: The current DEIS comment period of just 30 days is similarly insufficient for robust public engagement.

The Bottom Line

The people in many states are as concerned as ever about roadless area management, with more than 625,000 public comments submitted during scoping – and more than 99% opposing rescission. Further, numerous Inter-Tribal organizations have adopted resolutions in favor of retaining Roadless protections, including the National Congress of American Indians resolution unequivocally opposing the proposed rescission and demanding government-to-government consultation on the matter.

Over the past 25 years, the Roadless Rule has demonstrated that flexible protections for high-quality, intact forest ecosystems are effective, widely supported, and essential for responsibly managing forests that welcome current and future generations. Rescinding the rule would harm North Carolina's tourism industry and undermine decades of conservation and preservation efforts. I respectfully urge the Department to select the "no action" alternative. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Stein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" and last name "Stein" clearly distinguishable.

Josh Stein
Governor