

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

We write to oppose the proposed rescission of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (“Roadless Rule”) that prohibits new road construction and commercial timber harvesting in inventoried roadless areas (“roadless areas”). Eliminating the Roadless Rule will harm California’s already overburdened water sources, will counterintuitively decrease communities’ fire resilience, and will have negative economic impacts throughout our state.

For 25 years, the Roadless Rule has protected nearly 60 million acres across the United States from new road construction and commercial timber harvesting in some of our nation’s most intact and environmentally significant areas. In California, the U.S. Forest Service manages 20 million acres of national forests, including over 4.4 million acres of roadless areas.

California’s national forests act as the state’s natural water infrastructure, supplying roughly 65% of California’s total water supply, despite making up only 20% of the state’s land area. Unpaved and poorly maintained forest roads are notoriously the largest source of human-made sediment in public waterways. Protected roadless areas actively safeguard California’s water quality by preventing the severe erosion and landslides that choke pristine rivers with silt and other pollution that inevitably follows road construction. Roadless areas directly anchor the vulnerable origin points of the Sacramento, San Joaquin, American, Kern, Smith, and Eel Rivers, and these protected areas capture, clean, and regulate more than 11 trillion gallons of water annually. The raw, wholesale market value of the water produced by California’s national forests is estimated at roughly \$3.2 billion annually, and serves as the underlying foundation for our multi-billion-dollar agricultural, municipal, and energy industries.

Despite what opponents of the Roadless Rule argue, it does not ban firefighting or fuel reduction activities in our national forests. Agencies retain full authority to remove trees, clear brush, and construct temporary emergency access roads to protect public safety. Local managers frequently conduct thinning, remove small-diameter trees and underbrush, and execute prescribed burns within roadless areas—particularly along existing boundaries where ignitions are most likely.

Most alarming is that when new areas are opened up to roads, wildfires become much more likely. Recent research demonstrates that wildfires are four times more likely to start near roads than in roadless areas. Because California’s national forests—such as the Los Padres and Angeles National Forests—directly border massive urban populations, human-caused ignitions

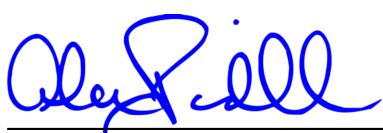
are the state's primary wildfire threat to communities. By limiting road construction, the Rule isolates rugged terrain from vehicles, campfires, and equipment sparks. Moreover, when fires do burn through roadless areas, they often burn at lower, more natural intensities which keeps the underlying soil healthy and minimizes post-burn soil erosion impacts. The State of California currently spends billions of dollars each year toward wildfire mitigation and suppression, so removing this rule will result in even more fires and will unnecessarily cost California taxpayers more to support the State's wildfire response efforts.

Roadless areas are also essential to maintaining and supporting our state's outdoor recreation economy that draws people from around the world. California's national forests host 33 million visitors per year, shifting hundreds of millions of dollars from urban centers directly into rural gateway communities through hotel taxes and local sales taxes. This tax revenue directly funds essential rural municipal services that many counties in California otherwise could not afford. The Roadless Rule also protects thousands of miles of hiking and mountain biking trails and hundreds of miles of whitewater paddling runs across the country, which allow outfitters and other small businesses to thrive. The strength of our outdoor economy is intrinsically tied to these roadless areas remaining protected from industrial development.

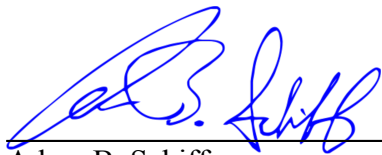
Finally, as you will undoubtedly find during this comment period, the proposed repeal of the Roadless Rule is deeply unpopular among our constituents. At the time of its adoption, the Rule received over 600 public hearings and over 1.6 million comments—more comments than any other rule in the nation's history. Despite the significant amount of public consultation that went into the 2001 Roadless Rule, this Administration only gave our constituents 21 days to comment on the initial announcement for the Roadless Rule repeal—during which more than 600,000 comments were submitted and 99% of which supported retaining the Rule. Now, the Administration is only allowing a 47-day comment period on the draft Environmental Impact Statement. Beyond all that, any new roads that are built would leave taxpayers on the hook for road maintenance, all while the U.S. Forest Service already has a \$7-8 billion road maintenance backlog.

For these reasons and more, we strongly oppose the rescission of the Roadless Rule. We urge you to leave the Rule intact so that it can continue to provide its time-tested benefits to our state and nation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



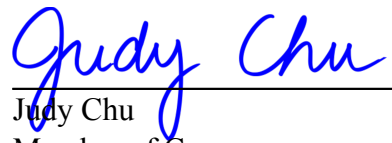
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Jared Huffman
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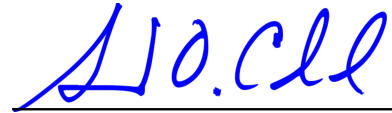
Brad Sherman
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Judy Chu
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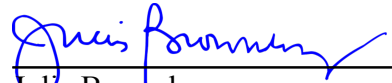
Maxine Waters
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Salud Carbajal
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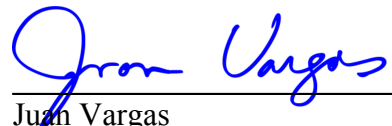
Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



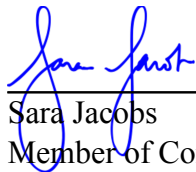
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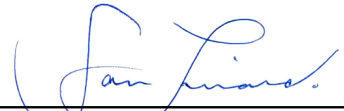
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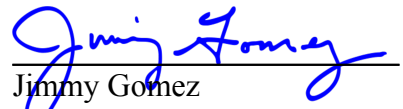
Nanette Diaz Barragan
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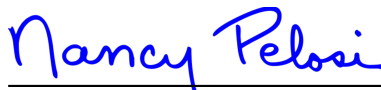
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Nancy Pelosi
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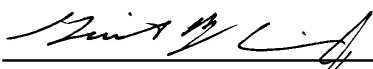
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J. Luis Correa
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Dave Min
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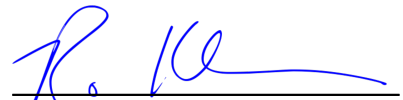
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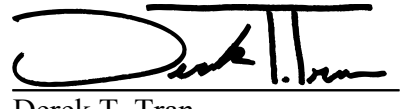
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Ro Khanna
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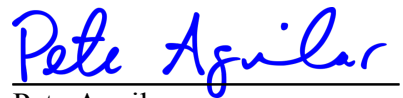
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
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Derek T. Tran
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John Garamendi
Member of Congress



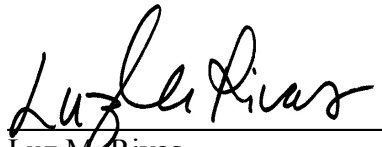
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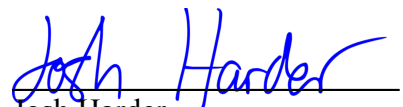
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