Carolina Mountain Club Opposes Rescission of the Roadless Rule

Carolina Mountain Club opposes the proposed rescission of the Roadless Rule, which has protected roadless areas of our national forests from most road construction and timber harvesting for more than 25 years.

We recognize the need for active forest management and support appropriate flexibility to address wildfire risk, forest health, ecological restoration, and public safety. We do not believe those needs require removing the protections that have preserved the roadless character of these public lands.

CMC is a nonpartisan, member-led organization whose members hold a wide range of perspectives. Our position is grounded in our mission and more than a century of hiking, trail stewardship, conservation, and service to the public lands of Western North Carolina.

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, enacted in 2001, protects designated tracts of land in National Forests from most new road construction and commercial logging. The original idea was to help stop the growth of a $8.4 Billion maintenance and construction backlog of maintained roads in the USFS System by reducing the number of new roads built on Forest Service land. Building new roads in high-elevation or hard to reach areas where timber production was too costly was blocked, and roughly 58 million acres of land was conserved under the Roadless Rule.

Currently, the rule covers roughly 30% of the entire USFS system, or about 58.5 million acres of National Forest land overall. About 152,000 acres of land in Pisgah National Forest and Nantahala National Forest is currently designated as roadless, including areas surrounding popular destinations like Black Balsam and Mount Mitchell. There are still roads, access points, infrastructure, etc that fall within these roadless areas but generally these areas are conserved.

The proposal to rescind the roadless rule states the purpose is to “reduce regulatory burden and return decisionmaking for the management of inventoried roadless areas to the land management planning process at the individual national forest level”. At face value, this allows individual forest districts to make the decisions necessary to accomplishing their forest goals, whether that be fire-management, logging, recreation, or public safety via access. However, building new roads can cost anywhere from $10k-$500K+ per mile. Making the building of new roads financially prohibitive for a forest with an already limited budget. For perspective, while not in a roadless area, the construction and repair of Cathy’s Creek Road in ‘24-’25 cost roughly $800K.

If the rule is rescinded, logging does not happen immediately and trails are not automatically replaced with roads. Acts like the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act will still be in effect and Wilderness designations will continue to function. However,

the removal of the rule removes baseline protections and reduces the level of scrutiny needed to build infrastructure in these areas. Trails and areas that CMC has cared for for over 100 years could see the forest landscape change near them.

Whichever way you slice it, the potential rescinding of the Roadless Rule is a change to how parts of the National Forest landscape will be allowed to be managed. The CMC is committed to supporting access to the trails we manage and our USFS partners that make it possible. If you would like to learn more and leave a public comment, please do so here: Proposed Roadless Rules Changes