

Rule to Keep Roads Out of The Woods Isn't Out of The Woods

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Roadless Rule has survived its latest federal court test, a 10th Circuit Court of Appeals decision on Oct. 21. Despite overwhelming public support since its creation in 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule has been challenged repeatedly and still faces tests in court and in Congress.

For 10 years, the policy has protected about 50 million acres of national forestland across the country from road-building, logging and development. Almost 2 million of those acres are in Washington.

Conservation groups are cheering the decision and say it ends a decade of legal uncertainty.

Tom Uniack, conservation director with the Washington Wilderness Coalition, says despite the legal victory, as many as a dozen bills are lined up in Congress to roll back environmental protections.

"Unfortunately, we're in the midst of significant congressional attacks on our public lands, and roadless areas are right in the crosshairs. House Bill 1581 would actually strip roadless protections, and it includes every one of our 2 million acres of roadless areas in the state of Washington." The Roadless Rule has survived its latest federal court test, a 10th Circuit Court of Appeals decision on Oct. 21. Despite overwhelming public support since its creation in 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule has been challenged repeatedly and still faces tests in court and in Congress.

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House Bill 1581 would open up roadless areas and other public lands for energy development. The state of Alaska is also challenging the Roadless Rule in another federal court. The roadless federal lands in Idaho are already exempted entirely, a situation being challenged in court by conservationists.

The rule allows recreation on federal land, which the Forest Service estimates keeps 223,000 people employed in mostly rural areas.

Tom O'Keefe, roadless policy advocate with *The Outdoor Alliance*, says roadless areas also are important buffer zones between inhabited areas and federal wilderness.

"So many of us take for granted the places that are easily accessible, the places you go for a day trip or a family hike. They're just these really great places to enjoy that we all know and love, and often we don't even know that they actually are roadless areas."

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