

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

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### Statement / Witness Testimony

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STATEMENT OF JAMES R. SCARANTINO  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH  
OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
APRIL 4, 2000

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Dear Chairman Chenoweth-Hage and other members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present our views on one of the subjects under consideration, the protection of remaining significant roadless areas in our national forests and its relationship to recreational opportunities. Let me begin by introducing myself and the organization which I represent. I am the Executive Director of REP America, the national grassroots organization of Republicans for environmental protection. We were formed in 1995 to resurrect the GOP's great conservation legacy and to restore natural resource conservation and environmental protection as fundamental elements of the Republican Party's vision for America.

We Republicans have much cause for pride. Theodore Roosevelt began by preserving extensive areas of land for a lasting heritage of national parks, forests and wildlife refuges. President Nixon and other Republican leaders of his time pushed for the laws that today protect our air, water and endangered species. "Mr. Republican," Barry Goldwater, was a REP America member, as is Theodore Roosevelt IV, the great-grandson of America's greatest conservationist.

Significant majorities of Americans, regardless of party affiliation, support strong environmental protection. They want their elected leaders to protect public health and our natural lands heritage. Polls of Republican voters taken just last year show that half of those Republicans polled call themselves "environmentalists" and rank protection of the environment as an issue of equal importance with protecting family values and ahead of cutting taxes. (Zogby International Poll, 9/8/99).

REP America, after only a few years, now has members in 48 states. Our members include state and local elected officials, hunters and animal rights advocates, soccer moms and mountaineers, religious and fiscal conservatives, indeed Republicans from all branches and beliefs of our party. But we hold one value in common: we believe that environmental protection must be one of the highest goals for our party and

nation.

With that introduction, let me turn to the subject of my testimony, the protection of the remaining significant roadless areas in our national forests and how that relates to recreational opportunities.

REP America wholeheartedly endorses the current proposal to protect those roadless areas in our national forests of 5,000 acres or more from further road construction. I have enclosed a copy of our President's November 10, 1999 press release announcing our support for roadless area protection.

Our support for protecting roadless areas is two-fold. One, these are special areas, offering irreplaceable and unmatched environmental and recreational values. I will discuss this further below. Two, the huge network of roads in our national forests has been a bad deal for taxpayers. The Forest Service already has a network of at least 380,000 miles of roads. Many of those roads are in disrepair, and a danger to travellers as well an environmental hazard causing erosion and other problems. The Forest Service has an \$8.4 billion backlog on existing roads. Considering that the Forest Service cannot take care of the road system it already has, is there anyone who seriously contends it should be building more? We think not. The conservative thing to do is to conserve the remaining roadless areas and conserve taxpayer dollars. We can begin making government smaller by getting the Forest Service out of the road building business.

Our members have attended at least a dozen of the scoping hearings held during November and December 1999 on the Administration's roadless area protection proposal. I myself attended the regional hearing in Albuquerque and the Gila Forest hearing in Silver City, New Mexico. I heard a few people complain about President Clinton, the United Nations, and other things. But I did not hear one person at any one of these hearings--not any representative of off-road vehicle users or manufacturers, cattle growers, hunters, disabled advocates or county officials--not one person spoke in favor of building more roads in our national forests. Not one. In fact, at the Albuquerque hearing, the executive director for the Arizona/New Mexico Coalition of Counties for Stable Economic Growth, a group frequently lumped into the so-called wise-use movement, was wearing a cap passed out by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance that read: "Protect Our Wild Roadless Areas."

What I witnessed at the New Mexico hearings was unanimous support for not building any more roads. This sentiment in New Mexico fits with every poll I have seen related to the subject. A poll by Frank Luntz conducted in 1999 showed that 88% of Americans worry that many of the country's special places will be lost unless our government acts to protect them. According to a January 2000 survey by Linda DiVall, a **two-to-one majority of Republicans (62% to 31%)** supports the Administration's proposal to protect roadless areas. In polls conducted by the Heritage Forests campaign and released this week, the overwhelming majority of people polled in California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado and my state of New Mexico support the protection of roadless areas from further road construction. **This strong support for protecting our roadless areas crosses party lines, geographical distinctions, age groups, income groups, and political ideology.**

I also want to point out that the protection of roadless areas is really a Republican idea. As I mentioned before, it started a hundred years ago with Theodore Roosevelt, who frequently by executive order protected upward of 100 million acres of public lands. During the Nixon Administration, a proposal was drafted similar to that being offered by the Clinton Administration. I learned from a Republican who testified at the Albuquerque hearing that the protection of roadless areas was by the Nixon Administration viewed as good environmental policy, good fiscal policy and just plain good politics. The protection of the treasures of our natural forests enjoyed as much strong public support as it did then. But, for one reason or another, the

proposal drafted under President Nixon has been delayed and dragged out. As a witness at the Albuquerque scoping hearing said, "Let's get this done, once and for all, for the sake of President Nixon." REP America says, "Here, here.". Enough time has passed, enough consideration has been given, enough money has been spent on studies and commissions, enough public comment and critiquing has been conducted. Nothing has changed except the need to protect our roadless areas is more critical than ever. Let's get it done now. Yes, for the memory of President Nixon. And, yes, for the sake of all Americans, this generation, and all those to come.

We see only beneficial recreational impacts from the protection of roadless areas. I am a hunter, fisherman, a 4x4 owner and user, and a backpacker. Many of my friends are hunters. As an attorney I have probably represented more hunting guiding and outfitting businesses than anyone else in this country. I know and represent many ranchers. In my discussions with these groups of people--and I have actively sought their opinions on this subject--I have found hearty endorsement for halting further road construction in our national forests. I have not encountered anyone who wants the government building more and more roads into our forests.

From the hunter's point of view: There already is an extensive network of roads throughout our national forests. The problem encountered by many hunters is not too few roads, but too many. Vehicle traffic disrupts the hunting experience and disperses game. Hunters in search of the America of their dreams are disappointed to hear the roar of internal combustion engines when they thought they had escaped to the wild. And, the roadless areas are the locations of the highest quality hunting experiences, both in terms of the experience and the game harvested. A frequent phenomenon when roads are pushed into prime hunting areas is that the game moves on. The elk, deer, antelope and sheep know how to avoid the heavy areas of vehicle and hunter concentration. Hunters know that the roadless areas are key habitat and reserves for these game animals. And, many of my hunter friends relish the opportunity for the high quality hunting opportunities they find in roadless areas.

It is noteworthy that most poaching occurs along roads. Game and Fish Departments do not put out their metal deer decoys for spotlighters in roadless areas. Hunters know that the construction of more roads into their hunting areas also means more poaching and more difficulty in preventing and catching poaching. No good ethical hunter wants anything done that will facilitate poaching.

As for the impact of ATV's on hunting, let me quote from a leading hunting forum, Orion-The Hunter's Institute: "The presence of ATV's on public hunting grounds will probably be one of the largest contributors to loss of hunting opportunity that we've yet experienced. It puts animals at a disadvantage. It violates the security that wildlife once had in difficult terrain."

And if the wildlife are not protected, hunters suffer.

From the outfitters and guides view: There are already enough roads, more than enough, to service hunting clients who disdain physical exercise. It must be noted that it is illegal in most, if not all, states to shoot game out of a vehicle. So hunters have to walk, no matter what. The outfitters I know spend a good part of the year scouting for prime hunting areas in which to take their clients. People who come to the West from the urban areas of our country do not want to camp next to roads, and do not want noisy off-road vehicles disturbing their camp or their hunt. They will pay top dollar only for quality hunting opportunities. Every outfitter I know who runs a successful business with repeat customers gets his or her clients away from roads into pristine areas. They are selling the experience of the hunt as much as the hunt itself. Building more roads only harms their business, reduces the quality opportunities for their clients and reduces the

price they can bring for their services.

From the ranchers' perspective: I cannot speak for every rancher, of course. But I can speak for those ranchers I personally know and those who are members of REP America. Let me sum it up with what one man, a fourth generation rancher near Capitan, New Mexico told me. He said that the greatest threat to his custom and culture, and the greatest threat to the health of the lands on which he makes a living, is the off-road vehicle. He has related to me the harassment of his cattle by people on four-wheelers who think the cattle were put there for their entertainment. He has told me of the destruction of stream-sides and earth dams by ATVS. And, he talks of the disruption of the peace and quiet he has known by the whine of loud engines tearing up and down the roads and trails around his house and pastures. He holds government to blame because he believes it has turned a blind eye to the problem posed by these vehicles.

From the perspective of outdoor recreationist: There is hardly anywhere in this country that is not within a day's walk of a road. When Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot were working on preserving this nation's forests, they envisioned wilderness areas large enough that it would take two weeks on horseback to cross them without encountering a road.. There are not many, if any, of those areas. The Gila and Aldo Leopold Wildernesses in southwestern New Mexico are the nation's oldest and, combined, among the largest. Yet there are roads close around the perimeter, a road bisecting the wilderness from north to south, and other roads probing into the middle of the wilderness. There are roads snaking to the tops of mountains and down into canyons. No one can walk across these wilderness areas without crossing several roads. So, even for our oldest wilderness area, the original vision of Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot has not been fulfilled.

The problem with roads, from the perspective of an outdoor recreationist, is that they are not multiple use. A family that wants to hike and camp in the woods cannot camp within a mile of a road, in some instances, without feeling the impact of the road. The sounds of motorized vehicles--something that can ruin anyone's outdoor recreation--carry far from the road, especially in the case of ATVs and dirt bikes. As one writer has said, "Their noise is undemocratic--like second hand smoke." They are as equally inconsiderate of others. They monopolize the forests for themselves at the expense of everyone else.

The road itself is not designed for multiple use. It is designed for and suitable for vehicles. That is why it was built. If you disagree, take some children and try having them use a road at the same time as vehicle traffic. Put children on bikes and try to have them use the road when large SUV's are barreling down and throwing up choking clouds of dust in their wake. Try riding a horse with noisy ATV's and dirt bikes screaming around you. Imagine a group of wheelchair bound adventurers scattering out of the way of oncoming traffic. We all know that the vehicles push everything else out.

And, unfortunately, ORV's do not stay confined to the roadways and trails built for them.

From a monitoring report on the Wayne National Forest in Ohio about problems in managing ORV's: "We install signs and they are ripped out. We erect barriers and they are removed or ridden around. We rehab areas and they are violated again and again. We provide virtually no law enforcement presence on the Forest when use is highest. Whether it is the Wayne or any other Forest, the concept of 'off-road vehicle' is contrary to the mission of the National Forests. We cannot, regardless of dollars, maintain trails that will not erode into our streams. And we cannot control users equipped with vehicles designed to go on all types of terrain."

There is no evidence that there are too few roads in our national forests. The national forest system contain

at least 380,000 miles of inventoried roads. Travelling every Saturday for a solid eight hours, at the rate of 25 miles per hour, **it would take an ORV 36 years to cover the entire existing forest road system.** The fact that so many thousands of miles of existing roads are unused and in disrepair shows that there may be an oversupply of road-based recreational opportunity. It is a simple logical exercise to see that, since our current system is not overused, any increase in road building will only result in a net loss of recreational opportunities to those persons who depend upon roadless areas. They will simply have fewer and fewer places to go, while the motorized vehicle user has more places than he has or can use.

Who are the people who depend upon and want roadless areas in our National Forests for recreational opportunities? The first category to come to mind is young people. There is a huge growing interest in what some in the industry call "muscle-powered recreation" and "extreme sports." More and more young people are engaging in snowshoeing, rock climbing, trail running, back country skiing, and backpacking each year. It is a growth industry by any standard. The object of these sports is to power one's self in the surroundings of pristine nature, not to let an internal combustion engine do the work. Trail runners, hikers, even hunters cannot enjoy themselves on the same mountain trail that has been taken over by the noise and smelly emissions of motorized trail bikes. The construction of more roads means fewer outdoor recreation opportunities for these people.

Another group are nature enthusiasts, people who view wildlife and, particularly, birds. In New Mexico, this group is larger than I ever would have imagined. I know ranchers who are supplementing their income by leading bird watching trips into the remote...and roadless...areas of their grazing permits. Ask the typical bird watcher, a woman, 40 years and older, how she would like a line of noisy, smelly ORV's to go tearing by her just as she has spied a rare willow flycatcher in a cottonwood grove.

And the other group, a very significant group which may not come readily to mind, are older people. On the peaks of Colorado mountains, you will usually find a sign-in sheet for climbers rolled into a capped piece of plastic pipe. Read the names inside and you will find more and more of our senior citizens celebrating a seventieth birthday by climbing a mountain. And with them are other senior citizens, and frequently the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts, their grandchildren. I have been on many rugged peaks in New Mexico and found at the top a plaque left by a group of old friends with all their names and ages carved into the wood.

There is a wonderful man named Harry White who lives in the beautiful town of Glenwood, New Mexico. I have and others have encountered him deep in the Gila Wilderness or the Blue Range Primitive Area in Colorado. He takes off for a week at a time, carrying all his gear with him. He is sometimes accompanied by a dear life-time friend. I have had occasion to be way off a marked trail in search of water. Far from any trail in the soft sand of a hidden spring I have found Harry's footprint (yes, I called him to confirm it). Harry is a marvel and inspiration. He is 78 years old and going strong.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "I wish to preach not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life." Harry White would be a star student in Teddy's class.

Recently I had an opportunity to climb up Hillsboro Peak, near the ghost-town of Kingston in southwestern New Mexico. The entire hike was inside roadless Forest and Wilderness areas. When I reached the crest, I met two men, both about 65 years old. They were retirees, one a teacher and the other an engineer. They told me they spent as much time as they could in the woods. We traded stories about the special places we had been in the mountains. The teacher stood and met my eye as we talked. The engineer sat. I could not see his eyes for the hat he wore. When we had finished, they donned their gear and prepared to leave. It was

then that I realized the engineer was blind. My first thought was, "What a shame, he is missing so much." But then it dawned on me what the experience of being deep in the woods, away from the sounds of mechanized traffic, must mean to this man.

We hear complaints that if roadless areas are protected, it will mean denying access to these lands. That is illogical. There are and will be no fences or walls prohibiting anyone from walking into these woods. But if more roads are built, people like Harry White and the blind engineer and his friend will be denied access to pristine roadless areas because those areas will no longer exist.

We have more than enough roads already. The roads we have are underused and undermaintained. We do not need any more roads. Give the forests and the taxpayers a break. It is that simple.

I thank the Chairman and the Subcommittee for their consideration of what I have offered in this statement.

Respectfully submitted,  
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REP America  
The National Organization of  
Republicans for Environmental  
Protection.

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