

Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources

[energy](#) - - Rep. Barbara Cubin, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6208 - - (202) 225-9297

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

**Testimony of Steve Moyer, Vice President of Conservation Programs,
Trout Unlimited
Regarding Energy and Roadless Area Conservation on the National Forests
Before the House Committee on Resources, Subcommittees on Energy and Mineral
Resources and Forests and Forest Health
April 4, 2001**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittees today on behalf of Trout Unlimited ("TU") regarding energy and roadless area conservation on the National Forests. TU is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to conserve, protect, and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. TU has more than 130,000 members in the United States.

TU and our members are deeply invested in protecting and restoring trout and salmon habitat on the National Forests. Since our inception in 1959, our members have devoted hundreds of thousands of dollars and thousands of man-hours to on the ground restoration work on watersheds on the National Forests. They have invested considerable time into studying and commenting on Forest Service policies of all kinds, from national policies such as the roadless conservation policy, to revisions of national forest management plans, to individual road reconstruction and grazing allotment decisions.

Summary of TU's Position on the Forest Service's Roadless Policy

TU supports the roadless policy because of the great fish and wildlife habitats roadless areas contain, because of the substantial adverse impacts that roads have on fish and wildlife habitat, and because of the huge backlog of existing, unaddressed forest road maintenance costs. It make good sense to us to fix the all too common existing broken roads and habitat in the National Forests before building new roads into roadless areas and incurring even more costs for which we cannot pay.

As the Subcommittees consider the potential benefits of increased energy production from roadless areas on the National Forests, we urge the Subcommittees to fully consider what would likely be high costs to the federal fisc as well as fish and wildlife habitat if greater energy development were to occur in roadless areas. Further, the Subcommittees should consider the current, great needs to restore healthy fish and wildlife habitats on the National Forests. Finally, the Subcommittees must consider the huge backlog of road maintenance and reconstruction needs on the existing forest road system and the substantial adverse affects those poorly maintained roads have on fish and wildlife. I assure you that TU stands ready to assist the Subcommittees as they consider these important aspects of forest road policy, and fish and wildlife habitat, in addition to the ramifications of the roadless area policy itself.

Summary of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Alliance (TRCA) Position on Managing the National Forests and Roadless Areas

I am also here today speaking as one of the six trustees of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Alliance (TRCA). The TRCA consists of TU, the Izaak Walton League of America, Wildlife Forever, the Mule Deer Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Wildlife Management Institute. Our organizations believe the future of the National Forest System is of great importance to healthy fish and wildlife species, clean water and the opportunity for all Americans to enjoy quality hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation on our public lands. The purpose of our Alliance is to educate and motivate hunters and anglers to positively influence the future of our 192 million-acre National Forest system.

Relevant to today's hearing, TRCA supports the general forest policy direction contained in "Square Deal Initiative #1" (below) that was carefully drafted by the TRCA trustees, and was included in the a letter to President Bush, which was signed by over 100 sportmen's conservation clubs across the nation. I have brought copies of the letter for the Subcommittees, and I ask that it be included in the hearing record.

TRCA's Square Deal Initiative #1: Room to Roam - Landscape and Access Management

"We urge elected officials and public land managers to scientifically manage all fish and wildlife habitat in the National Forest System, whether roaded or unroaded, as valuable and unique lands that will remain open to hunters, anglers and other public users. Balance accessibility to National Forest lands, with the year round requirements of fish and wildlife (habitat, clean water, food, shelter, open space and disturbance management), while maintaining a functioning forest road system, including keeping roadless areas roadless (with science-based exceptions made for forest health, restoration, and other national needs)."

National Forest Roadless Areas contain valuable fish and wildlife habitat, which sustains valuable hunting and fishing recreation.

The roadless policy would ban new road construction in 58 million acres of inventoried roadless areas in the National Forests, while maintaining access for anglers, hunters and other public users. Roadless areas are known to include some of the best remaining habitat for fish and wildlife in the nation. Especially in the western U.S., roadless areas are vital for trout and salmon resources, and for big game, such as elk and mule deer. National Forests support 80% of the elk, mountain goat, and bighorn sheep habitat in the lower 48 states.

The following are a few examples from Montana National Forests:

- The South Fork of the Flathead has perhaps the state's strongest populations of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Most of the watershed is roadless (mainly in the Bob Marshall wilderness).
- The Blackfoot drainage has some of the healthiest populations of migratory bull and cutthroat trout in Montana. The three most important spawning tributaries for bull trout are Monture Creek, the North Fork and the Landers Fork. Large portions of these watersheds are roadless. Bull trout are uncommon in heavily roaded drainages of the Blackfoot drainage.
- Rock Creek is one of the most popular wild trout fisheries in the state. Approximately half of the watershed is roadless. Biologists have found that most of the important spawning and rearing areas for bull trout are in waters flowing through roadless areas such as the Quigg Peak and Stony Mountain areas.

- The majority of the remaining pure-strain native westslope cutthroats in the upper Missouri drainage, where these fish hang on by a thread, are in roadless areas found along the Rocky Mountain Front, in the Elkhorns, in the upper Big Hole watershed and in the roadless fragments found near the Continental Divide.

Fish and wildlife resources found on National Forests, such as those highlighted above, sustain hunting and fishing recreation that is extremely valuable to local economies. According to a 1999 report from the American Sportfishing Association, in 1996 fishing on the National Forests produced \$8.5 billion to the nation's economy. Hunting yielded \$6.1 billion. Much of this value comes from trout and salmon fishing, and big game hunting. Roadless area protection is tied to the long-term sustainability of these huge benefits.

Simply put, world class hunting and fishing are still available to the public in the remote areas of our National Forests and use trends show hunting and angling rising at five percent per year nationwide. In some areas like California, hunting use of National Forests is doubling in eight years, while fishing use of Alaska's Tongass National Forest doubled in the last seven years. Further, if America's 50 million hunters and anglers grow in proportion to the population of the U.S. during this century, wild space open to the public will be at an absolute premium.

Roads Often Damage Fish and Wildlife Habitats

Existing poorly designed and maintained roads are some of the biggest environmental threats to aquatic life and wildlife in our National Forests, promoting soil erosion in fish spawning and rearing areas and destroying the water quality of streams.

Studies from the Forest Service's Interior Columbia River Basin plan, for example, conclude that:

- Increasing road density and management intensity is correlated with declining pool frequency and increased fine sediments in streams. Pools are important winter and foraging habitat. Sediment from roads fills pools and smothers spawning gravels. Thus, roads are harming critical elements of aquatic habitat.

A huge and pressing backlog of forest road maintenance needs already exists.

The Subcommittees should bear in mind that the forest roads debate should start by recognizing that the Forest Service has an \$8.4 billion backlog on maintenance and reconstruction of its existing 386,000 miles of road. As we consider the prospect of building new roads to access hard to reach, potential, energy or timber sources, we need to address the question, "Why build more when we can't care for what we have?"

The Tongass road situation is but one bad example. The Forest Service in cooperation with the State of Alaska, recently completed the Tongass Road Condition Survey, which determined that 53 percent of culverts (164 of 301 culverts) in Class I streams are impeding passage of juvenile salmon under certain conditions, while another 29 percent (80 of 301 culverts) in Class I streams *may* be impeding passage. The estimate for repairing the culverts in the Tongass National Forest is at least \$20 million.

There is a clear need for the Resources Committee to request, and for Congress to appropriate, the funds that the Forest Service needs to improve road maintenance and reconstruction, as well as funds needed to eliminate unfixable roads, which are damaging fish and wildlife habitat.

The amount of available energy from roadless areas is debatable. The high cost of developing those resources, relative to the costs of developing other energy sources in roaded areas, is not.

According to the Forest Service, the roadless policy could have some impact on leasable minerals, such as oil and gas, because the policy would prohibit road construction associated with future mineral leasing. Yet, the Forest Service's roadless documents say that there appears to be relatively small amount of oil, gas and coal in roadless areas. In context, total oil and gas production from all National Forest lands is about 0.4 percent of the nation's supply, and since the roadless areas have been available to oil and gas leasing for many years and have remained undeveloped, it is difficult to see where the supplies really are.

A study done recently for the Energy Department held a different view. The study found that roadless areas "contain moderate to significant amounts of natural gas and oil."

TU is not an energy expert and thus we are unable to shed much light on the debate surrounding availability of energy sources on roadless areas. What we do know is this: roadless areas have remained such for a reason -- most are difficult to access. Building roads to access energy in the roadless areas would likely be costly ventures. Add in the fish and wildlife habitat harm produced by these roads, and the result of any contemplated energy development in roadless areas is likely to be an expensive proposition. The Subcommittees must carefully look at the costs, as well as the benefits, of energy production from roadless areas.

Millions of Americans, including hunters and anglers, support keeping roadless areas roadless.

Finally, the Subcommittees should keep in mind that 1.6 million Americans commented in favor of the roadless policy being as protective, or more so, than it is right now. This is the largest outpouring of public support for any federal rulemaking in history.

Similarly, a survey of American hunters and anglers commissioned by the TRCA last year found a very strong response from sportsmen and women in support of keeping roadless areas roadless: 83% of respondents favored such a proposition. In short, support for roadless area protection runs deep, and it includes sportsmen and women.

In sum, TU supports the roadless policy because of the high habitat and recreational values that they sustain, and because the substantial damage roads incur on fish and wildlife habitat. We also support the best science-based management of those areas, as well as all of our National Forests. We urge the Subcommittees to fully consider what would likely be high costs to the federal fisc as well as fish and wildlife habitat if energy development were to occur in roadless areas.

We look forward to having a more detailed dialogue with the Subcommittees on these issues. Also, we urge the Subcommittees to work with us on fixing the longstanding problems associated with lack of funding for roads maintenance and reconstruction and fish and wildlife habitat restoration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the hearing.

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