



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

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REGULATORY & INDUSTRY
RELATIONS

Joseph M. Ventrone
Managing Director

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Content Analysis Team
Attention: Roadless State Petitions
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 221090
Salt Lake City, UT 84122

RE: Comments on the Federal Register notice “Special Areas; State Petitions for Inventoried Roadless Area Management” 69 Fed. Reg. 42636 (July 16, 2004)

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the one million members of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR), I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Forest Service’s proposed Roadless Area Management process. NAR members are involved in all aspects of the real estate industry, including developing, buying and selling commercial and residential properties.

According to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the Federal Register, the Forest Service’s proposed rule for the management of inventoried roadless areas would establish administrative procedures and a petition process for Governors to review the existing management requirements for roadless areas in their states, and petition the Department of Agriculture to establish or adjust these management requirements. This would be a significant regulatory shift away from current policy, which prohibits road construction in most of our country’s inventoried roadless areas on national forests. NAR supports this new proposed approach, for the following reasons:

The Proposal Supports a Multiple-Use Approach to Public Lands Management

The essence of the National Forest System, as opposed to national parks or wilderness areas, is a commitment to a multiple-use approach in maintaining and sustaining our country’s valuable forest resources. NAR is a strong supporter of the multiple-use model to maximize productivity, recreational opportunities and environmental protection on public lands. As proposed, we believe this new petitioning process would support the multiple-use tradition and policy of the national forest system. This process would allow individual states to make decisions about how best to manage inventoried roadless areas in their state, depending upon each state’s unique conditions and circumstances.

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The Proposal Would Have Beneficial Economic Consequences

Allowing increased state control over the management of inventoried roadless areas would have beneficial economic ramifications for rural communities adjacent to these areas. Over the years, national forests have become the center of a vibrant web of economic activities that would be supported by this initiative. Timbering, agriculture, tourism, guiding and the wide variety of satellite service industries, such as hotels, real estate, restaurants and retail shops, would all benefit. This process will not impede this economic activity and will allow states and communities to decide for themselves the best way for these areas to be utilized.

The Proposal Would Provide Accessibility to Inholders and Others

State-specific management plans for inventoried roadless areas would be more effective at taking into account the issue of accessibility for inholders and other members of the public. Property owners are provided the right under the Fifth Amendment to maximize the economic value of their property, with limited restrictions. By ensuring accessibility to this inholder property, by roads if necessary, the value of that property will be sustained.

This new approach would also provide accessibility to other members of the public, by building roads to promote birdwatching, hiking, biking, fishing and camping. Roads or other access methods make these vast public properties accessible to those who would otherwise be unable to participate in these activities.

The Proposal Will Promote Energy Independence

The rule prohibiting road construction in inventoried roadless areas did not take into account a study sponsored by the Department of Energy that found that changing roadless boundaries by 5 percent would yield 10 trillion cubic feet of natural gas at a time when domestic supplies are declining. This is just one example of the valuable resources that can be safely extracted from properties in the National Forest system. Instability in current energy supplies makes these resources even more valuable. Furthermore, these resources are not limited to carbon-based sources such as oil or natural gas. Alternative sources such as wind, hydro and thermal power can all be harnessed through innovative and environmentally sound methods.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Forest Service's proposed state petitioning process for managing roadless areas. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Russell W. Riggs, in NAR's Regulatory and Industry Relations Department, at 202-383-1259.

Sincerely,



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Regulatory and Industry Affairs