



Backcountry Roadless Areas Threatened by Congress

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Backcountry roadless areas provide essential fish and wildlife habitat and unparalleled hunting and fishing. Studies have shown that backcountry lands offer the longest hunting seasons, the most trophy bulls and bucks, and the highest hunter success rates. These areas contain strongholds for trout, salmon and steelhead, and provide clean, cold water to downstream fisheries. Even those hunters and anglers who never step foot in backcountry roadless areas benefit from the big game security habitat and clean water that these lands provide.



Photo by Scott Yates

Currently, some in Congress are eager to remove the reasonable roadless area protections that provide for higher quality hunting and fishing opportunities. The *Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011* would open more than 35 million acres of Forest Service lands that are currently protected by the *2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule* to road building and development. In addition, the *Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011* would release 6.7 million acres of Wilderness Study Areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Fishing and hunting annually generates \$76.7 billion in economic activity. Maintaining the quality habitat found in roadless areas is essential to sustaining this economic engine. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule helps to keep valuable game and fish habitats just the way they are, so that they may continue to serve as cherished places to fish and hunt.

Protecting Backcountry: What's at Stake?

These backcountry habitats are extremely important to sustaining Trout Unlimited's mission to protect high quality watersheds. Across the West, we've studied a handful of states and have found that a significant portion of endangered, threatened, and iconic trout species depend highly on unroaded pristine habitat. For instance, in Idaho, 94% of streams listed as impaired to due sedimentation occur outside watersheds that flow through backcountry roadless areas. Clearly, there are important benefits for watersheds that are below protected headwaters, and the numbers show it. We found the following percentage of watersheds for each trout species flowed at least in part through roadless areas:

Idaho

- 68% of Bull Trout watersheds
 - 87% of strong populations
- 74% of Chinook Salmon watersheds
- 74% of Steelhead watersheds
- 48% of Redband Trout watersheds
- 58% of Westslope Cutthroat watersheds
 - 83% of strong populations

Colorado

- 76% of Greenback Cutthroat
- 58% of Rio Grande cutthroat
- 71% of Colorado River Cutthroat

Oregon

- 18 of the 20 sub-watersheds where Westslope Cutthroat occur contain roadless areas
- 83% of bull trout spawning and rearing habitat.
- 54% watersheds of strong populations of Redband trout.

Wyoming

- 67 Percent of Wyoming's Yellowstone Cutthroat habitat is in undeveloped areas.
- 73 percent of Wyoming's Colorado River Cutthroat populations occupy less than 5 miles of stream habitat and a total of 51 percent of their habitat lies in roadless areas.

Even if you never fish backcountry waters, it is vital habitat that provides downstream fishing opportunities. Our reports also show that in regards to hunting, roadless areas consistently provide more abundant elk and mule deer, longer seasons, and better hunting success rates due to the secure habitat provided by these protected public lands.

Road Maintenance Backlog

In addition to the lost hunting and fishing opportunities this legislation would cause, the bill also does not make fiscal sense. The Forest Service currently faces a national road maintenance backlog exceeding \$8.4 billion. All roads and trails increase erosion and sedimentation, but poorly maintained roads do so at a vastly accelerated rate. It is unwise to consider road building in new areas when the Forest Service cannot afford to maintain the road system it already has.



Photo by Tom Reed

Help Us Fight This Attack on Our Hunting and Fishing Heritage

Trout Unlimited's vision is that by the next generation, robust populations of native and wild coldwater fish will once again thrive within their North American range, so that our children can enjoy healthy fisheries in their home waters. To achieve this vision, we must protect high quality habitats, reconnect them to surrounding areas, and restore degraded habitats. Roadless backcountry areas are the core strongholds where trout and salmon can persist until they can return to restored habitats nearby. As such, they are a critical tool in Trout Unlimited's conservation strategy, and must be protected from attempts to open them to road building and development.

Call your members of Congress today by contacting the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and asking them to connect you to your elected officials. Ask your Representative and Senators to oppose the *Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011* (listed as H.R. 1581 in the House of Representatives, and S. 1087 in the Senate).



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