



West Virginians *for* Public Lands

The Roadless Rule in West Virginia

The “Roadless Rule” was established by the US Forest Service in 2001 after an extensive inventory and mapping of undeveloped public lands. Today the Roadless Rule conserves 44.8 million acres in 37 states.

There are 182,000 roadless acres among the three national forests within West Virginia. The Monongahela National Forest has the largest share at 162,000 acres, followed by the George Washington NF (15,700 ac) and the Jefferson NF (4,800 ac).

The Monongahela National Forest has over 2,100 miles of roads. Nowhere in West Virginia is further than 3.2 miles as-the-crow-flies from a road. Roadless areas make up less than a fifth of the Monongahela National Forest and just over 1 percent of the state of West Virginia. Roadlessness is a rare and valuable quality for both recreation and wildlife.

Roadless areas are often remote backcountry areas. In West Virginia, the vast majority of roadless areas are managed by the Forest Service for recreation and include some of the most iconic landscapes in the state: Roaring Plains, Seneca Creek, Cheat Mountain, Canaan Loop, Tea Creek, North Fork Mountain, and Hills Creek Falls. In many cases our roadless areas adjoin designated Wilderness Areas, creating larger intact ecosystems, providing greater recreation opportunity, and enhancing the “wild and wonderful” qualities of these regions. Dolly Sods, Otter Creek, and Cranberry Wilderness are surrounded by roadless areas.

Logging is generally prohibited in roadless areas, but the Roadless Rule does contain practical exceptions: firefighting, personal firewood gathering, and habitat improvement for rare species are allowed. Overall, the Roadless Rule provides common-sense protections for undeveloped public land by limiting the intrusion of new roads that fragment forest habitat and degrade water quality. As a result, roadless areas throughout West Virginia are prized for their solitude, trout streams, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities for hunters, anglers, hikers, paddlers, and mountain bikers.

Keeping the Roadless Rule in place maintains the status quo. No commercial logging now occurs in Roadless Areas, so no jobs are lost if it remains in place. To the contrary, West Virginia has much to lose if the Roadless Rule were repealed. West Virginia’s roadless areas are among our most popular outdoor recreation destinations and fundamentally support our tourism economy.