

A woman with brown hair, wearing a red and black plaid shirt, dark suspenders, and blue jeans, is hiking through a dense forest. She is holding a long, thin walking stick in her right hand. The forest is lush with green foliage and tall trees. The title text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

# ROADLESS AREAS OF THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS

WHAT WE'VE LOST AND WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

A REPORT BY  
SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER  
SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN FOREST COALITION  
WILD VIRGINIA  
VIRGINIA FOREST WATCH



# SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN ROADLESS FACTS

There are 728,487 acres of roadless areas on the National Forests of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia that are protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. If the rule is reversed by the Bush administration, 553,000 acres, or seventy-six percent of those areas would be placed into management designations that allow roadbuilding and/or logging not allowed under the rule.

State	Roadless Acres	Percentage of State in Roadless Areas	Acres of Roadless Areas at Risk	Percentage of Roadless Areas at Risk
Alabama	12,437	0.04	11,298	91
Georgia	63,661	0.17	55,198	87
North Carolina	172,000	0.51	142,000	83
South Carolina	8,000	0.04	5,353*	67*
Tennessee	84,715	0.31	26,213	31
Virginia	387,674	1.43	313,028**	81**
<b>Total</b>	<b>728,487</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>553,090</b>	<b>76</b>

\* Includes acreage where logging off existing roads is allowed: 2,899 acres in SC (36%) open to roadbuilding

\*\*Includes acreage in Jefferson NF (72,751 acres, RX 12B) where logging, but no new roads are allowed. For George Washington NF, includes acres in MA 9, 13, 14, 15, and 21 where new roads and logging are allowed.

There are currently more than twelve thousand miles of roads traversing the National Forests of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Of these roads, forty-three percent are open only to logging trucks and other high clearance vehicles. Eighteen percent are closed. Only thirty-nine percent are open to the general public.

State	Closed Roads	High Clearance Only	Open to Public Passenger Vehicles	Total
Alabama	457	872	611	1,940
Georgia	114	786	638	1,538
North Carolina	596	1,012	963	2,571
South Carolina	526	89	995	1,610
Tennessee	183	853	523	1,559
Virginia	332	1,689	967	2,988
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,209</b>	<b>5,301</b>	<b>4,697</b>	<b>12,207</b>

Source: US Forest Service

The maintenance backlog for these existing roads is more than two hundred million dollars.

State	Forest Service Road Maintenance Backlog	State	Forest Service Road Maintenance Backlog
Alabama	\$17,580,889	South Carolina	\$39,109,685
Georgia	\$53,036,303	Tennessee	\$35,722,830
North Carolina	\$41,293,752	Virginia	\$19,376,183

Source: US Forest Service<sup>2</sup>

Ninety-seven percent of the comments received by the Forest Service from the citizens of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia supported the complete protection of all roadless areas.

State	Percentage Support	State	Percentage Support
Alabama	95.9	South Carolina	96.3
Georgia	96.5	Tennessee	97.7
North Carolina	97.4	Virginia	98.3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>97%</b>

Source: US Forest Service<sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

**B**etween 1992 and 1997, nearly 16 million acres of forest, farms, and open space across the nation were converted to urban or other uses.<sup>3</sup> A recent study by the Forest Service shows that the South is losing its native forests to sprawl development and pine plantations at an alarming rate. In the last decade, the South lost 2.9 million acres to sprawl while another 4.5 million acres of native forest were replaced with pine plantations. In addition, logging is predicted to increase across the South by fifty percent by 2040. As much as thirty-one million acres of forested land are predicted to be lost to urbanization. As America's population centers continue to grow, and wild and open spaces disappear, our national forests become more and more valuable.

In 1998, the U.S. Forest Service responded to the nation's need and desire to protect its last wild forests by placing an eighteen-month moratorium on the construction of new roads in the last remaining unprotected and unroaded, or "roadless", forests on the national forest system.. The agency then began a public rulemaking process to permanently protect the last intact third of the national forest system. By January 2001, after holding more than six-hundred public hearings and meetings and receiving 1.6 million public comments—more than ninety-five percent in favor of complete protection nationally, and ninety-seven percent in favor in the Southern Appalachians—the process was complete. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which protects the remaining inventoried roadless areas on our national forests from most logging, road construction, drilling and mining, was signed into law.

But just as the Roadless Rule was scheduled to take effect, the Bush administration moved to block it. First, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card froze its implementation. Then Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman postponed its effective date, and announced the Bush administration's intentions to amend the rule and reopen the public comment process. On December 23, 2003, while families across America gathered for the holiday season, the Bush administration exempted the largest national forest in the country, the Tongass Rainforest of Alaska, from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Since then, the administration has announced plans to revise or remove protection for roadless areas throughout the rest of the country, including the Southern Appalachians.

The national forests of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia are already criss-crossed by more than twelve thousand miles of roads. Forest Service inventoried roadless areas make up only about thirteen percent, or 728,487 acres, of the national forests in these five states, well below the national average of thirty-one percent. If the Bush administration reverses the rule, seventy-six percent, or 553,000 acres of these roadless areas would be placed into management designations that permit logging and road-building.

This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in the Southern Appalachian national forests prior to the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and just a few of the roadless areas we stand to lose should the rule be reversed.

**IF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION REVERSES THE ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE, OVER HALF OF A MILLION ACRES, OF THE REMAINING ROADLESS AREAS OF THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS WOULD IMMEDIATELY BE PLACED INTO MANAGEMENT DESIGNATIONS THAT PERMIT LOGGING AND ROAD-BUILDING.**

# MOUNTAINTOWN ROADLESS AREA



The 12,000 acre Mountaintown Roadless Area in Fannin and Gilmer counties extends from the southeast boundary of the Cohutta Wilderness Area to the Blue Ridge divide. The five-mile long Mountaintown Creek Trail passes along the cascading creek with dramatic falls and gorges. The stream is popular for native trout angling and the area is a favorite for hunters, hikers and campers. The area is rich in botanical species and harbors significant stands of old growth. The Benton MacKaye Trail runs along the Blue Ridge crest in the eastern portion of the area.

The newly released forest plan for the Chattahoochee National Forest fails to protect this roadless area. Absent the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, it would be placed in management designations that allow road construction and logging.



MOUNTAINTOWN  
ROADLESS AREA

-

CHATAHOOCHEE  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

-

GEORGIA

-

THREATENED

Wood mushrooms on a fallen hemlock tree over Mountaintown Creek and Barnes Creek Falls in the Mountaintown Roadless Area

Photos by Rene Voss



## KELLY RIDGE ROADLESS AREA



The Kelly Ridge Roadless Area lies in Towns and Rabun counties just north of the Tray Mountain Wilderness Area and west of Lake Burton. The 18 north-facing coves of Kelly Ridge, including the pictured Ramp Cove, harbor a strikingly rich diversity of plants, including old-growth buckeye trees and a dense understory of wildflowers.

Due to its high ecological and recreational values, conservationists have prioritized this area for permanent protection, but absent the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, logging and road construction would be permitted throughout most of the area. The Forest Service has particular plans to harvest in the remaining high elevation old growth.



The Appalachian Trail and Ramp Cove in the Kelly Ridge Roadless Area

Photos by William Clay and Rene Voss

KELLY RIDGE  
ROADLESS AREA  
-  
CHATTAHOOCHEE  
NATIONAL  
FOREST  
-  
GEORGIA  
-  
THREATENED

# CHEOAH BALD ROADLESS AREA



Logging Along Shell Stand Road in the Cheoah Bald Roadless Area

Photo by WR Thomas

## CHEOAH BALD ROADLESS AREA

-

## NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST

-

## NORTH CAROLINA

-

## PARTIALLY LOGGED THREATENED

The Cheoah Bald Roadless Area is an outstanding wildland southwest of Bryson City, North Carolina in Graham and Swain counties. The area is prime black bear habitat, and contains ten rugged miles of the Appalachian Trail along its ridge top. The Sassafras Gap hiker's shelter is near the center of the tract. Cheoah Bald itself, over which the Appalachian Trail runs, is known for its striking views and has been called the "Grandstand of the Southern Appalachians."

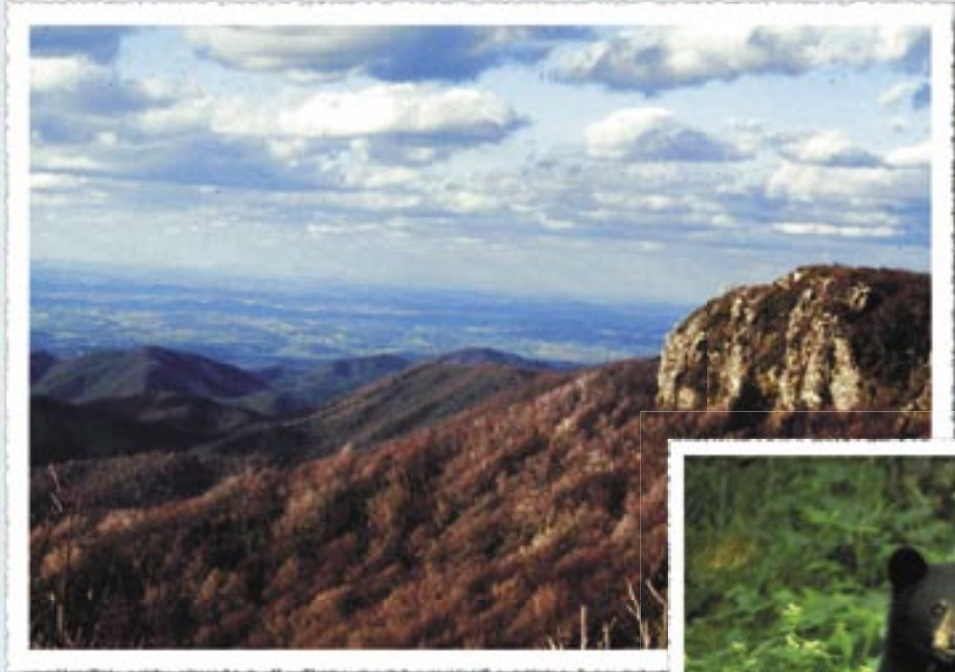
The Nantahala River, world-renowned for its whitewater paddling, runs through the spectacular Nantahala Gorge along the area's southeast border. The area is exceptionally popular with hunters, hikers and naturalists. The area contains patches of old growth, and rare fruit producing American chestnut trees were found there in the early 1990's.

At the time of the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) in 1979, the area was inventoried at approximately 21,364 acres.

Large scale road construction (including the Shell Stand Road shown in the picture) and logging in the 80's scarred and fragmented a large portion of the landscape. Now the Forest Service includes only 7,810 acres in its roadless inventory, a reduction of sixty-three percent. Another large logging and road construction project, the Grassy Gap/Wesser sale, was proposed in the late 1980's but permanent roads were eliminated from that sale due to conservationists' efforts to protect the remaining roadless lands.

Cheoah Bald is one of 32 inventoried roadless areas (including potential additions to wilderness areas) constituting approximately 151,000 roadless acres in the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests in western North Carolina.

# BALD MOUNTAIN ROADLESS AREA



The Bald Mountain Ridge in Tennessee, and a Southern Appalachian Black Bear  
Photos by William Clay and Bill Lea



At 22,715 acres, the Bald Mountain Roadless Area, spanning the Tennessee and North Carolina border, is one of the largest intact forests in the eastern United States. The area has one of the largest and healthiest populations of black bear in the Southern Appalachians, and is also rich in rare plant species, such as the marsh marigold.

The Appalachian Trail winds through the area for more than six miles with outstanding views from cliffs and outcrops. Located just six miles southeast of Greenville, it is a favorite spot of many outdoor enthusiasts in east Tennessee.

Until the enactment of the Roadless Rule, the Forest Service's Forest Plan for the Cherokee National Forest placed fourteen percent of the area in management designations that emphasized logging. Should the Roadless Rule be reversed, the newly revised Forest Plan for the Cherokee would open the entirety of the Tennessee portion of the area (11,744 acres) to salvage logging, small clearcuts, and "temporary" roads. Even the Bald Mountain Ridge Scenic Area, which is a part of the roadless area is open to road construction - as long as visual impacts are "minimized." Without the Roadless Rule, the Forest Plan for the Pisgah would open the North Carolina portion (10,971 acres) to road construction and logging as well.

**THE BALD  
MOUNTAIN  
ROADLESS  
AREA**

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**CHEROKEE  
AND PISGAH  
NATIONAL  
FORESTS**

-

**TENNESSEE  
AND NORTH  
CAROLINA**

-

**THREATENED**



# THE SLIDE HOLLOW ROADLESS AREA



The Slide Hollow Roadless Area

Photo by Tom Davenport

The 4,400 acre Slide Hollow Roadless Area is located in Carter County, Tennessee, north of Roan Mountain along the North Carolina border. The Appalachian Trail crosses the southern portion of the area through an old-growth forest along the pristine Sugar Hollow Creek. Twisting Falls lies in the northern portion of the area, as does the Elk River. The roadless area provides an integral patch of unfragmented wildlife habitat in a landscape where it is rare.

Slide Hollow was named for the mudslides that occurred there in the early 1900s due to the land's unstable soils. In 1997, the Forest Service proposed logging 191 acres in Slide Hollow, building nearly a mile of new road, and converting 1.35 miles of old logging tracks into roads. The logging would have occurred near the Appalachian Trail and the Elk River, and could have exacerbated conditions for more mudslides. The 1998 moratorium on road building in roadless areas and the subsequent Roadless Area Conservation Rule put the project on hold.

If the Roadless Rule is reversed, the area would be open to logging and road-building.

**SLIDE HOLLOW  
ROADLESS  
AREA**

-

**CHEROKEE  
NATIONAL  
FOREST**

-

**TENNESSEE**

-

**THREATENED**



# HICKORY FLAT BRANCH FORMER ROADLESS AREA



Logging Roads in Hickory Flat Branch  
Photos by Hugh Irwin

The Hickory Flat Branch Area is located in Carter and Johnson counties just south of the Stony Creek Scenic Area and adjacent to the Big Laurel Branch Wilderness Extension. It contains five miles of the Appalachian Trail, including the Iron Mountain Shelter.

Hickory Flat Branch was inventoried as a roadless area in the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) in 1979, but due to extensive logging and road-building in the 1980s, the area has been excluded from the current roadless area inventory.

The draft forest plan places the area in land-use categories that allow further logging and road-building at the Forest Service's discretion. Thus this former pristine roadless area will likely continue to be degraded.



**HICKORY  
FLAT BRANCH  
FORMER  
ROADLESS  
AREA  
-  
CHEROKEE  
NATIONAL  
FOREST  
-  
TENNESSEE  
-  
ELIMINATED  
FROM  
INVENTORY**

# BEAR CREEK/CRAWFISH VALLEY ROADLESS AREA



Beaver Activity in the Bear Creek/Crawfish Valley Roadless Area

Photo by Jim Waite

**BEAR CREEK/  
CRAWFISH  
VALLEY  
ROADLESS  
AREA**

**JEFFERSON  
NATIONAL  
FOREST**

**VIRGINIA**

**THREATENED**

The Bear Creek/Crawfish Valley Roadless Area (18,211 acres in Smyth and Wythe counties) is the largest inventoried roadless area in the Jefferson National Forest. This area, just north of the I-81 corridor, is very popular with hunters and hikers, and includes eight miles of the Appalachian Trail. Local conservationists have prioritized this area for permanent protection.

Should the Roadless Area Conservation Rule be reversed, approximately 3,700 acres of this area would be immediately opened to road construction and logging, including clearcutting.

The area includes entire watersheds from ridge top to ridge top, including Bear Creek and Reed Creek, a top-notch trout fishing stream. Bear Creek is home to a number of rare fish including the Tennessee Dace. It also hosts significant tracts of old-growth forest. Crawfish Valley has great topographic complexity, with a multitude of knobs, crests, and coves. The area contains an extensive network of trails, and the enclosure of the hardwood forest canopy gives visitors a sense of remoteness and quietude.



# DOLLY ANN ROADLESS AREA



Located only a few miles from the town of Covington, Virginia, the 7,804 acre Dolly Ann Roadless Area offers spectacular backcountry recreation opportunities with fairly easy access. The area has several excellent hiking trails, including the Dry Run Trail and the Skyline Trail, and supports a wide variety of plant and animal life. The topography of the area is characterized by large boulders, rock ledges, rare eastern old growth stands and waterfalls. Elevations range from approximately 1,430 feet near Covington to 4,072 feet at Big Knob Peak, the highest point in Alleghany County. The Dolly Ann Roadless Area also contains several native brook trout streams, including the particularly beautiful Dolly Ann Hollow Creek, lined with large trees, boulders, and waterfalls.

If protections under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule are reversed, nearly forty percent of the area will be opened to logging. The Forest Service's Peter's Ridge Timber Sale proposed before the implementation of the Roadless Rule is located entirely within the boundaries of the Dolly Ann Roadless Area. The town of Covington passed a resolution against the sale and has prohibited log truck traffic through residential sections of the town.



Dolly Ann Hollow Creek and a Decomposing Tree in Dolly Ann  
Photos by MA Jones

**DOLLY ANN  
ROADLESS  
AREA**  
-  
**GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
NATIONAL  
FOREST**  
-  
**VIRGINIA**  
-  
**THREATENED**



Logging and a Pink Lady Slipper in the Big Stony Roadless Area  
Photos by Steve Brooks and Bill Lea

The Big Stony area in Virginia's Scott and Wise counties is part of the extremely popular High Knob and Bark Camp Lake Recreation Area. The area is located within the magnificent view of High Knob Tower from which five states can be seen.

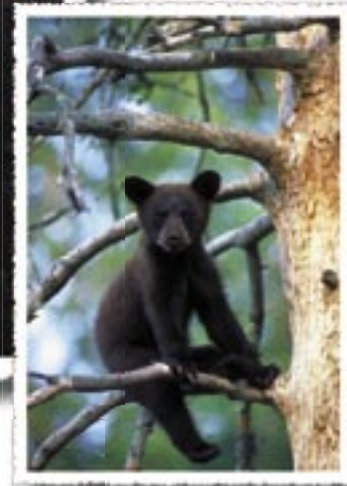
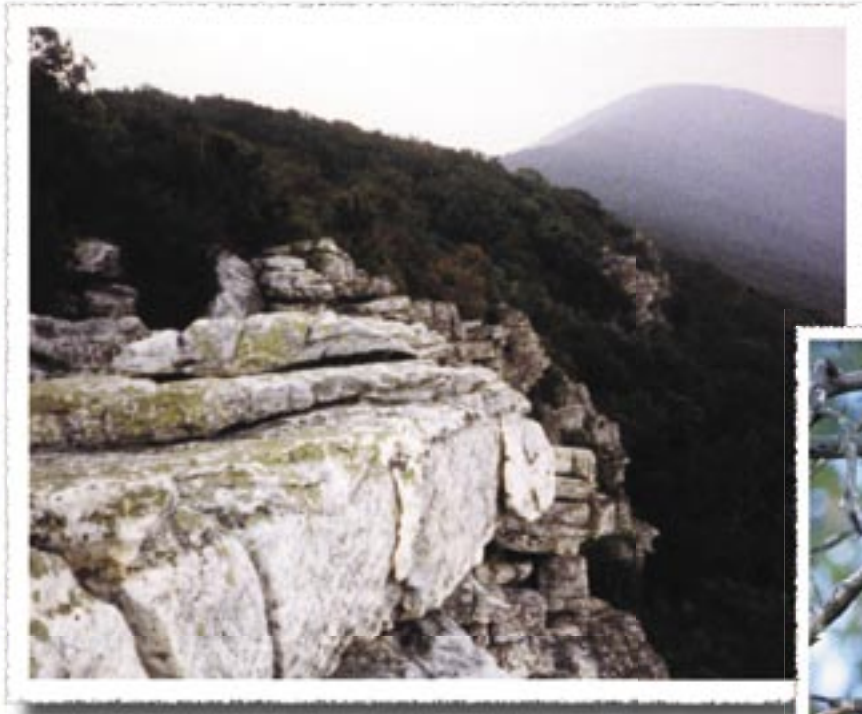
In the 1980's, the Big Stony Roadless Area was subjected to substantial road-building and logging activities, which disqualified it from the 1996 roadless inventory. In addition, the roading and logging of the Stony Creek drainage area contributed to severe floods and landslides.

Nevertheless, approximately 40,000 people each year take advantage of the incredible views and recreational opportunities offered here. High Knob Lake is connected by the 15-mile Chief Benge Scout Trail to Bark Camp Lake. The area is known for outstanding hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping. The area drains to the Clinch River, one of the top aquatic diversity hotspots in North America, harboring 21 federally listed species of fish and shellfish.

In 2001, the Forest Service finalized a proposal to log 700 acres of the High Knob area. Nearly five miles of road construction and reconstruction would be necessary to carry out the logging. Thousands of local citizens have signed petitions opposing the timber sale which is now being challenged in federal court by the local citizen group, the Clinch Coalition.

**BIG STONY  
FORMER  
ROADLESS  
AREA  
-  
JEFFERSON  
NATIONAL  
FOREST  
-  
VIRGINIA  
-  
ELIMINATED  
FROM  
INVENTORY**





The Big Schloss Roadless Area and Resident Black Bear Cub  
Photos by M.A. Jones and Bill Lea

The Big Schloss Roadless Area is located in Shenandoah and Frederick counties, Virginia, and Hardy County, West Virginia. During the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) in 1979, the area was 36,526 acres, making it the second largest National Forest roadless area in the east. Numerous timber sales and road building projects over the years have whittled the acreage down to only 20,755 acres, a decrease of more than forty percent. If the Roadless Area Conservation Rule is reversed, the entirety of the area would be open to salvage logging and even road-building in certain circumstances.

Additionally two timber sales, the Slate Timber Sale and the Paddy Timber Sale, are currently scheduled on a 5,000 acre roadless tract of the original Big Schloss area on Great North Mountain.

Elevations at Big Schloss range from 1,600 to 3,300 feet, with numerous rock outcrops, ridges, and drainages. The area is entirely covered with hardwood and coniferous forests. A well-developed and popular trail system traverses Big Schloss, including a segment of the 250 mile Big Blue Trail, which connects with the Appalachian Trail in Shenandoah National Park. Wild trout lure anglers to Little Stony Creek. Numerous rock outcroppings, cliffs, and boulder fields are favorite hiking destinations, as well as nesting areas for the endangered Peregrine Falcon.

**BIG SCHLOSS  
ROADLESS  
AREA  
-  
GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
NATIONAL  
FOREST  
-  
VIRGINIA  
-  
PARTIALLY  
LOGGED  
THREATENED**

# CRAWFORD MOUNTAIN ROADLESS AREA



The Crawford Mountain Roadless Area  
Photos by Steve Krichbaum

**T**he Crawford Mountain Roadless Area, which provides headwaters for the Shenandoah and James Rivers, lies in Augusta County, just west of Staunton, Virginia. At the time of the Forest Service's second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) in 1979, Crawford Mountain was inventoried at 15,360 acres. Forest Service logging and road construction have whittled the area down to 9,868 acres in the latest inventory, a thirty-four percent loss.

Crawford Mountain's steep rock covered slopes range from 1,660 to 3,728 feet. A diversity of forest types characterizes the area, from Pitch and Table Mountain Pine on dry ridges to northern hardwoods on moist upper slopes. Crawford Mountain is one of the most heavily utilized black bear habitats in the state. The Chimney Hollow Trail provides accessible and beautiful hiking opportunities.

Numerous timber sales have occurred in the rich lower elevations of the former RARE II area, such as the Jehu Hollow project in 1998. The resulting roads now facilitate the illegal use of the area by all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) and poachers. The West Dry Branch Timber Sale in 1995 logged and built roads in both the Crawford Mountain Roadless Area and the adjacent Elliot Knob Roadless Area.



**CRAWFORD  
MOUNTAIN  
ROADLESS  
AREA**

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**GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
NATIONAL  
FOREST**

-

**VIRGINIA**

-

**PARTIALLY  
LOGGED  
THREATENED**





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Founded in 1986, SELC is the only non-profit regional organization dedicated to protecting the native forests, wetlands, air and water quality, wildlife habitat and rural landscapes in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. SELC works in partnership with more than 100 diverse groups on legal advocacy, policy reform and public education to achieve lasting environmental protections at the national, state and local level.



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Wild Virginia is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to preserving wild forest ecosystems in Virginia's National Forests. Founded in 1995 by UVA students and local activists as Shenandoah Ecosystems Defense Group (SEDG), the organization has always been rooted in public lands forest protection through volunteer action.



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Since 1994, the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition (SAFC) has been a unique coalition working to protect our region's public lands at the landscape level -- beyond political and ownership boundaries.. Today we have created a compelling conservation vision for the 21st Century; greater regional representation in Washington DC; and have helped strengthen twenty-one national, regional and grassroots organizations spanning the six states of Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.



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Virginia Forest Watch (VAFW) is a grass-roots based coalition of individuals and environmental groups organizing throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Our mission is to maintain and restore the natural ecology and biodiversity of woodlands across Virginia through education and citizen participation.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Official road mileage according to the Forest Service system-wide fiscal year 2002 Road Accomplishment Report.
- <sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service. 2003. *Fiscal year 2004 Forest Service Budget Justification*. (Washington, DC).
- <sup>3</sup> Dombeck, Mike, Chief, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, An Opportunity; December 29, 1999

**I**n January of 2001, after thirty years of debate and the largest public participation process in US history, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was signed into law. The Roadless Rule, as enacted, protects the last intact forests on America's National Forest System, their wildlife habitat, their clean air and water, their opportunities for recreation and their unspoiled open spaces for current and future generations of Americans.

But now the Bush administration is threatening to unravel the rule, opening these last wild forests once more to road construction and logging.

If the Bush administration reverses the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, seventy-six percent, or over half of a million acres, of the remaining roadless areas of the Southern Appalachians would immediately be placed into "management designations" that permit logging and road-building.

This report profiles some of the roadless areas we have lost in the Southern Appalachian national forests prior to the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and just a few of the roadless areas we stand to lose should the rule be reversed.

Please, contact Dale Bosworth, Chief of the US Forest Service and ask him to keep the Roadless Area Conservation Rule intact, and to protect America's last wild forests. Forever.

**Dale Bosworth**  
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