

## Vilsack: New National Forest Planning and Roadless Rules Needed

**I**n an August 14 speech in Seattle, Washington, US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, outlining the Obama administration's "shared vision [that] adopts an all-lands approach" to forest management, said the US Forest Service would write new regulations for implementing national forest planning under the National Forest Management Act. He also said the agency would support the 2001 rule or draft a new rule for managing nearly 60 million acres of roadless areas. What follows are excerpts from Secretary Vilsack's 25-minute speech.

As many of you may know, in late June a federal court overturned the 2008 planning rule put forward by the US Forest Service. This came on the heels of a similar court decision overturning the 2005 planning rule. Faced with this, the Forest Service had a decision: to appeal these decisions or not. Well, we've decided not to seek further review of the latest court decision, and I've asked Chief Tidwell to develop a new planning rule to ensure management and restoration of our national forests with the goal and the vision of protecting our water, climate, and wildlife, while also creating economic opportunities.

Another area of our shared vision must be adequate protection for roadless areas. President Obama was quite clear during the campaign in his support for protecting roadless areas. Just last week, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court's decision reinstating the 2001 Clinton roadless rule. I view this as a very, very positive development. Yet the Forest Service is still subject to an injunction from Wyoming District Court judge in the 10th Circuit, enjoining the Forest Service from implementing the 2001 rule. Let me be clear: We will seek

to lift the injunction in light of the 9th Circuit decision, and if the courts remain conflicted or if it's not possible to protect roadless areas through the courts, we will initiate a new rulemaking process to do so.

I recognize that some states are already taking action on roadless areas. Colorado is moving forward with its own roadless rule, as Idaho already has. We believe Idaho's rule is a strongly protective one for roadless areas, and we note that Governor Ritter has wisely has asked for additional input on his draft roadless plan for Colorado. He understands as I do that Colorado needs strong roadless protection, and so does the entire nation.

The threats facing our forests don't recognize property boundaries. So, in developing a shared vision around forests, we must also be willing to look across property boundaries. In other words, we must operate at a landscape-scale by taking an "all-lands approach." The reality is that 80 percent of the forested area in the United States is outside of the National Forest System, and many of our national forests are adjacent to state and private lands. Management decisions that are made both on and off the national forests obviously have important implications for that forest landscape.

More broadly, privately owned forestlands across the country face a daunting set of challenges. The Forest Service estimates that over 40 million acres of private forest could be lost to development and fragmentation over the coming decades. Americans tend to think that deforestation is a problem only in tropical countries. Well, I'm here to tell you that we have our own deforestation problem right here in the United States of America, and this has enormous implica-



**On August 14, US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack gave a speech in Seattle, Washington, that outlined the Obama administration's vision for managing the nation's forests.**

tions for the climate, our drinking water, our rural economies, and wildlife. Just keeping forests as forests remains a significant challenge. The good news is that conservation groups, the forest products industry, and government agencies are increasingly willing to unite to address the common threats of the potential loss of private forest lands. I want the Forest Service and the US Department of Agriculture to partner with these stakeholders in protecting privately owned forests....

Government programs provide only part of what is needed to realize our shared vision. For forest ownership and stewardship

to remain viable, it must remain economically rewarding as well for landowners. Markets for wood will remain important to those landowners and local communities, but private and public landowners must also access new markets for both low- and high-value products and services and forest uses in which to underwrite stewardship activities. Emerging markets for carbon and sustainable bioenergy will provide landowners with expanded economic incentives to maintain and restore our forests. The Forest Service must play a significant role in the development of these new markets and must ensure their integrity.



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