

NATIONAL FOREST ROADS POLICY BRIEFING MATERIALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I.** Introduction: The Need for a New Forest Service Roads Policy
- II.** The Pacific Rivers Council's Recommendations
- III.** Detailed Analysis of the Proposed Roads Policy
- IV.** Initial Comments on the Policy by the Pacific Rivers Council and The Wilderness Society
- V.** Current Status of Roads on Forest System Lands
- VI.** Ecological Effects of Roads
 - Summary of Scientific Findings on Roads and Aquatic Ecosystems
 - Review of Ecological Effects of Roads on Terrestrial and Aquatic Communities
- VII.** Federal Register Notices Regarding Proposed Roads Policy

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INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A NEW ROADS POLICY

"There are few more irreparable marks we can leave on the land than to build a road."

-- Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, 1998

On March 3, 2000, USDA Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck released the agency's proposed road management policy for public comment. This policy revision is a critical step toward reversing five decades of destructive road-building in National Forests. The Pacific Rivers Council has prepared this briefing book to provide information on the ecological effects of roads, a detailed analysis of the proposed policy changes, as well our recommendations for improvements in the proposed policy that will establish ecological sustainability as the priority of the national forest road system.

In evaluating the draft roads policy, it is important to recognize that road construction has been one of the most ecologically damaging activities conducted under the auspices of Forest Service management of public lands.

- The current National Forest road system is vastly overbuilt -- more than 400,000 miles of roads crisscross our National Forests. This is nine times more roads than in the entire interstate highway system!
- Roads contribute to reduced water quality through increased sedimentation, applied road chemicals and toxic spills.
- Roads contribute more sediment to streams than any other land management activity.
- With increasing road density, there is a clear decline in the frequency of large pools - fundamental components of high quality fish habitat.
- About 60% of the National Forest System roads are not fully maintained to the planned environmental standards.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please express your support for an ecologically sustainable National Forest road system by participating in the public comment period for the draft road policy. The information presented in this briefing book will help you develop your comments. Please use PRC's recommendations as a template.

Public comments on the proposed changes are due May 2, 2000. Comments may be sent by mail to USDA Forest Service, CAET, Attn. Roads, P.O. Box 22300, Salt Lake City, UT 84122, by fax to (801) 517-1021, or by e-mail to roads/wo_caet-slc@fs.fed.us. More information is available on the Forest Service's roads policy web-site: <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/roads/>.