ROADLESS

America's Sporting Lands

TROUT UNLIMITED

"This country has been swinging the hammer of development so long and so hard that it has forgotten the anvil of wilderness which gave value and significance to its labors. The momentum of our blows is so unprecedented that the remaining remnant of wilderness will be pounded into road dust long before we find out its values."
– Aldo Leopold, 1935

Chris Wood, President and CEO, Trout Unlimited

It is challenging to think of a policy or rule that has withstood six presidential administrations—three Republican led and three Democrat led. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is one of them.

The rule was enacted in 2001 after an intense public comment period where more than 1.6 million Americans participated—more than 90 percent of whom supported protecting roadless areas.[1] The rule protects 58.5 million acres of pristine national forests from new road construction and industrial logging. Importantly, the rule still allows actions to maintain and improve forest health, e.g. via treatments to reduce the risk of unnaturally intense fires and to help prevent insects and disease.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of roadless areas to fish and wildlife and hunting and fishing. In Idaho, 74 percent of all Chinook salmon and steelhead habitat is found in roadless areas.[2] More than half of the strong populations of Redband trout in the Columbia basin are found in roadless areas.[3] In Utah, over 99% of roadless areas are designated by the state as crucial or substantial habitat for mule deer[4] and nearly 87% for elk.[5] Roadless areas are not just important in the West. At least 80% of New Hampshire's roadless areas support native brook trout.[6] Millions of Americans source their drinking water from roadless areas.[7]

Although roadless areas occupy just 2% of the land in the United States, a whopping 25% of all threatened and endangered species live in roadless areas.[8] Keeping roadless areas intact affects less than 0.2% of the nation's timber demands from national forests.[9] Oil and gas development across the entire National Forest System supplies less than 0.25% of the nation's energy, with only a fraction of that coming from roadless areas.[10] Other uses and activities such as grazing, off-road vehicle use, firefighting, hardrock mining, and other types of recreation are essentially unaffected or enhanced by the Roadless Rule.

Ninety years ago, Aldo Leopold recognized the value of maintaining the character of the wildlands that helped to shape our nation. Development of our natural resources helped to make America great. In the last analysis, however, it is respect for our lands and waters—the sort of humility that allows roadless areas to persist—that will sustain our fish and wildlife and sporting traditions and allow our great nation to endure.

Cover photos by: Josh Duplechian/Trout Unlimited (bottom) and Tom Reed (top)
All other photos by Josh Duplechian unless otherwise noted

Roadless Areas Matter to Hunters and Anglers

America's roadless areas—from Alaska's Tongass to Florida's Apalachicola—represent roughly 10% of America's public lands. They are places where hunters and anglers can still pursue their passions, where elk bugles echo off canyon walls and cutthroat trout lurk in the shadow of a backcountry cutbank, waiting on dinner to drift by.

Cradling some of the most productive fish and wildlife habitat in the country, these unfragmented national forest lands continue to offer the solitude, self-reliance, and opportunity that define our outdoor heritage.

The Roadless Rule's purpose is straightforward: to conserve the ecological, recreational, and economic values of remaining roadless areas by limiting new road construction and industrial logging in these areas. To be clear, the rule does not prevent wildfire mitigation or forest health treatments, motorized trails, grazing, firewood gathering, camping, habitat restoration, or other active management that supports forest health, wildfire mitigation, or recreation. Even energy projects, transmission lines, and mining development are allowed within roadless areas. Hunting and fishing access remains unchanged.

Roadless areas continue to support high-quality habitat and public access for hunting and fishing only because we, as a nation, have chosen to safeguard these landscapes. As this report outlines, hunters and anglers have a direct stake in how these lands are managed, and their perspectives are essential in shaping future policy decisions. We owe it to the future generations of hunters and anglers who rely on these wild public lands to keep these places roadless, healthy, and whole.

370,000

Miles of road exist in the National Forest System[11]

$10,800,000,000

Deferred maintenance backlog on Forest Service lands, 55% due to dilapidated roads[12]

Photo by Tom Reed

Roadless Areas Protect Crucial Fish Habitat

Roadless areas are essential, irreplaceable refuges for native trout and salmon across the United States. Research conducted by the U.S. Forest Service shows that roadless areas are nearly twice as likely to have properly functioning watersheds compared to roaded areas.[13] Roads introduce sediment and invasive species, alter hydrologic flows, fragment habitat, and create barriers to fish migration, directly impairing the cold, clean water that native salmonids require.

Roadless areas are vital strongholds for sensitive aquatic species. Evidence shows a strong correlation between the absence of roads and healthy fish populations, with approximately 70% of all roadless areas supporting native trout and salmon.[14] This critical habitat includes species ranging from native brook trout in the Appalachian Mountains to iconic salmon and steelhead runs of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, as well as various cutthroat trout species in the Rockies.

The need to maintain these headwaters is especially stark in the Intermountain West. In Idaho, the remaining roadless canyons and high-elevation streams make up the last best hope for recovery. Idaho has lost 65% of the historic range of Chinook salmon and 61% of the historic range of steelhead, yet roadless areas now account for 74% of the remaining habitat for both species within the state.[15]

The best available science shows time and again that roadless areas are key to the vitality of healthy stream ecosystems. Clean watersheds, free from sedimentation and run-off from neglected road systems, are the nurseries for future salmon and trout populations. The Roadless Rule protects these areas.

BULL TROUT

83%

of high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout in Oregon is found in areas with significant roadless land.[16]

REDBAND

50%

of the strongest remaining Redband trout populations rely on roadless areas.[17]

CUTTHROAT

70%

of Colorado Greenback and Colorado River cutthroat trout habitat is preserved within roadless lands.[18]

"In Wyoming, over 60% of roadless areas are home to native trout and they are the headwaters of some of our more popular fisheries, providing cold, clean water to rivers like the Snake, Shoshone and Clarks Fork. The Roadless Rule keeps these lands and waters healthy by preventing new impacts that sully streams and fragment habitat. In my experience, often the good hunting and fishing begin when the road ends – let's keep it that way."
– Larry Timchak, President of East Yellowstone Trout Unlimited and former Supervisor of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest

Roadless Areas Offer the Best Angling Opportunity

Die-hard anglers know to keep the best fishing spots to themselves. And yet, there are river systems that are too precious to keep a secret. They're called Gold Medal and Blue Ribbon rivers, creeks, and streams. Blue Ribbon and Gold Medal are prime trout fishing waters with strong habitat and fish populations, often designated at state or local level for their overall quality and angling value. Either label highlights waters that support healthy, sustainable trout populations in pristine or well-managed habitats, many of which begin in roadless areas that protect the crucial cold, clean headwaters these species depend on.

These are places like Wyoming's Blue Ribbon-designated Snake River, whose headwaters were designated a National Wild and Scenic River system in 2009. Nearly half of the streams on USFS lands that flow into the Snake River above Palisades Reservoir are in roadless areas.[19] Meanwhile, in Colorado, every single Gold Medal River—13 in all—are fed by cold, clean streams flowing from roadless areas.[20] In Montana, Wyoming, and Utah, nearly every Blue Ribbon stream is fed by cold, clean tributaries flowing from roadless areas.[21] Maintaining roadless landscapes sustains robust fish populations and the chance to experience a true trophy experience.

These rivers and streams serve as repositories of wild fish diversity and population strongholds. Over time, headwater populations can become distinctive from each other, sustaining important genetic diversity, while downstream they may foster various movement life histories. Without roads, dams, culverts, and other human disturbance, native fish in these interconnected habitats can migrate among spawning, rearing, overwintering and refuge habitats, increasing their population sizes and life history diversity, as well as their ability to handle disturbances like fires, flooding and debris flows. Sustaining the unique and varied traits of wild fish is necessary for their long-term survival, biodiversity, and stream health.

COLORADO	MONTANA	WYOMING	UTAH
26%	43%	30%	42%
of streams on USFS lands contributing to Gold Medal waters are on roadless.[22]	of streams on USFS lands contributing to Blue Ribbon streams are on roadless.[23]	of streams on USFS lands contributing to Blue Ribbon streams are on roadless.[24]	of streams on USFS lands contributing to Blue Ribbon streams are on roadless.[25]

"Inventoried Roadless Areas provide some of the most intact big game habitat left in this nation, while also providing accessible, high quality hunting opportunities. I killed my first bull elk in a roadless area, a memory I'll never forget, and an experience made that much richer by the undeveloped, wild landscape that surrounded me. It would be a profound tragedy if our children, and our children's children, did not have those same opportunities."
– Mark Kenyon, Director of Conservation, MeatEater

Roadless Areas Protect Prime Big Game Habitat

Photo by James Wicks

Roadless areas provide exceptional wildlife habitat and unmatched backcountry hunting opportunities that sustain our outdoor traditions. Big game like elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer—icons of the West—require high-quality summer and winter range, secure cover that supports breeding and migration, and core areas for forage and rest. For elk in particular, numerous studies have shown that they avoid open roads, reducing the effective habitat available to them.[26] In Montana alone, 93% of roadless areas are home to elk summer range.[27]

Mule deer populations have been a concern for hunters and wildlife managers since the 1990s, when range-wide declines contrasted sharply with the "glory days" of the late 1940s and 1960s. For example, mule deer are the most abundant big game animal in Utah.[28] Even so, their populations are still below management objectives.[29] Habitat loss from development is one of the key reasons for the population decline, according to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.[30] Roadless areas are key to the survival of this iconic big game species. Over 99% of roadless areas in Utah are designated as either crucial or substantial habitat for mule deer.[31] These areas often include high-quality spring, summer, and fall ranges for mule deer, which are vital for building fat reserves before winter and for the survival and growth of fawns.

Similar big game habitat values are found elsewhere. In Wyoming, 63% of mountain goat crucial winter and yearlong range is found in roadless areas.[32] Elk crucial summer range is 2.6 times more concentrated in Nevada's roadless areas than in the state overall.[33] In Idaho, 98% of roadless areas safeguard elk habitat.[34]

Roadless areas found at lower elevations, where habitats are more biologically productive and diverse, further enhance connectivity and protect migration corridors big game need to move between seasonal ranges. These intact forests and watersheds not only provide habitat for wildlife but also maintain access to quality hunting opportunities.

Photo by Corey Fisher

"The Roadless Rule is a well-thought-out policy that still manages to add some semblance of habitat conservation and connectivity to landscapes that would otherwise be plundered. For many small business owners, like outfitters, roadless areas help keep us in business by keeping quality habitat intact and wildlife populations healthy."
– Adam Gall, Outfitter at Dark Timber Lodge, Paonia, Colorado

Roadless Areas Offer the Best Hunting Opportunity

Big game animals are incredibly intelligent, especially in the fall when hunting season begins—just ask any elk hunter. In Idaho, three in four elk hunters typically go home empty-handed every year.[35] Those odds are roughly the same in Montana.[36] But if a hunter wants to increase their chances of killing an elk, research shows they have better odds if they get away from open roads.[37] Why? Quite simply, elk actively avoid areas near open roads, especially during hunting season, and seek out areas with low road density and good cover for security.[38]

While official statewide hunter success rates can be heavily influenced by areas with easy access that attract many hunters, the odds dramatically increase for individuals willing to put in the effort in roadless tracts. These remote zones often serve as production and security areas, providing the foundation for the entire herd's success.

For example, a detailed analysis of the White River Elk Herd—the world's largest, spanning Colorado and providing opportunity for over 30,000 hunters—highlighted the critical role of two roadless areas that serve as "primary production areas" for Game Management Unit 12.[39] Among Colorado's 15 most-hunted game management units, 14 include at least 66,000 acres of roadless land, and 12 contain more than 100,000 acres of backcountry habitat.[40]

For elk hunters packing into Wyoming's three million acres of roadless areas, the odds are better than average that they're going to fill the freezer with big game. In areas that are more than 90% roadless, hunters harvest around one bull for every 2.4 square miles. In contrast, in heavily developed areas with less than 10% roadless character, that number drops to one bull for every 25 square miles.[41] Harvest density is ten times higher in roadless areas than in heavily roaded ones.[42]

Filling the freezer might mean the end of a hunt, but it certainly isn't the only reason hunters venture into roadless areas. The solitude these tracts provide is matched by their value as refuges for elk, who learn to avoid roads and use rugged terrain for cover as they age. By prioritizing large, undisturbed landscapes, wildlife managers sustain both healthy game populations and opportunities to hunt mature bucks and bulls.

Impacts of Road Construction on Fish Habitat

In backcountry and headwaters ecosystems, road density and the health of coldwater fisheries share a direct, inverse relationship. Native species like bull and cutthroat trout now persist almost exclusively in areas with low or zero road density because road construction introduces three primary stressors: sedimentation, habitat fragmentation, and accelerated run-off.[43]

1. SEDIMENTATION: CHRONIC BLEED AND CATASTROPHIC FAILURE

Sedimentation occurs both through the "chronic bleed" of silt from rutted surfaces and the catastrophic failure of aging roadbeds. This fine sediment fills the interstitial spaces in spawning gravels, suffocating developing eggs and scouring stream channels down to bedrock.[44]

2. HABITAT FRAGMENTATION: THE CULVERT PROBLEM

Undersized or poorly installed culverts often act as barriers to migration. These structures isolate populations, preventing fish from reaching spawning grounds or thermal refuges during summer heat, which leaves small, fragmented populations vulnerable to local extinction from wildfire or drought.[45]

3. ACCELERATED RUNOFF

Roads act as artificial drainage networks. By intercepting groundwater and surface flow, compacted roadbeds funnel concentrated pulses of water into streams, leading to more violent, destructive peak flows and significantly lower summertime base flows.[46]

The science is crystal clear. New road construction, especially in sensitive backcountry areas, poses one of the greatest threats to healthy coldwater fisheries. Given that the strongest remaining native trout and salmon populations exist where road density is low or zero, the focus should shift away from building new roads and toward repairing and maintaining existing infrastructure to mitigate these chronic habitat threats.

"There have been numerous studies demonstrating how roads negatively impact trout and salmon populations by degrading water quality, fragmenting habitat, and creating barriers to fish passage. The Roadless Rule has been instrumental in conserving fish habitat and water quality across U.S. Forest Service lands, while allowing fire mitigation and habitat improvement projects to move forward. Trout Unlimited and our partners have carried out hundreds of these restoration projects in roadless areas, demonstrating how conservation, industry, and access can all coexist."

– Juliet Smith, Northern New Mexico Project Manager, Trout Unlimited

Impacts of Road Construction on Wildlife Habitat

Roadless areas provide some of America's best remaining habitat for big game. While these lands offer high hunter success rates and quiet backcountry access, new road construction threatens this balance. Much like culverts in a stream, roads fragment landscapes, pushing wildlife off public land and onto private agricultural fields where herds damage crops. This displacement is costly. One case in Idaho exceeded $1 million, depleting the state's entire depredation fund account.[47]

Roads serve as primary vectors for noxious and invasive weeds like cheatgrass and spotted knapweed.[48] These species degrade native forage, increase wildfire intensity, and cost land managers hundreds of millions annually.[49] Recent research has shown that the cost of controlling invasive weeds is 25 times higher than the cost of prevention.[50]

Beyond habitat loss, roads increase disturbance and hunting pressure.[51] While access is important, too many roads prevent bucks and bulls from reaching maturity. This degrades the population's age structure and reduces the availability of the mature animals that many hunters seek.[52]

Given the research and real-world costs, new road construction is an ecological and economic liability. Roadless areas are an insurance policy for maintaining a balance of secure habitat and access to quality hunting opportunities. Keeping roadless areas intact is the most efficient and cost-effective way to ensure sustainable big-game populations for future generations.

"First and foremost, wildland fire management decisions have the overriding goals of minimizing risks and maximizing actions that provide safety for agency resources and affected public. The most effective and cost-efficient places for active management to reduce hazardous fuels and protect communities is in the wildland urban interface. When fuels treatments like thinning are needed in roadless areas, the Roadless Rule already has exemptions that allow agencies to do this important work to improve forest health and safely manage wildfires."
– Julie Shea, retired Assistant Director Fire Management Planning, U.S. Forest Service, Region 1

Enhancing, not Hindering, Forest Management

Wildfire mitigation and forest health are hot topics for managers and users of our public lands, and there are misconceptions about what can and cannot be done in roadless areas. The Roadless Rule provides ample authority for active management and does not "lock out" agencies or industry from these landscapes.

The 2001 Roadless Rule was never intended to be a blanket prohibition on human activity. From the beginning, it included exemptions that allow land managers to protect public safety and ecosystem health, including removing small-diameter trees and other vegetation. These exemptions are actively used by the Forest Service to address modern fire challenges, and former Forest Service Chiefs from both Republican and Democratic administrations have stressed that the rule "specifically permits activities aimed at preventing and mitigating wildfire risks."[53]

Data drawn from the Forest Service dispels the myth that the Roadless Rule prevents fuel reduction. The agency's Rocky Mountain Research Station found that while roadless areas contain approximately 21% of the total tree cover across the National Forest System, they account for 34% of the total fuel treatment activities and 8% of total area treated.[54] Spatial analysis using agency data shows that hazardous fuels reduction projects have reduced fire risk on nearly 2 million acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas.[55]

Arguments for repealing the rule often hinge on the idea that new roads are necessary for fire suppression. However, this ignores the reality that 78% of human-caused fires on national forests nationwide start within ½ mile of a road[56] and 85% of wildfires are human-caused.[57] A 2025 summary of wildfire data indicates that wildfire ignition density is significantly higher within 50 meters of a road compared to roadless areas.[58] Other research has found no correlation between "roadlessness" and increased fire severity.[59]

Given limited budgets, dismantling the Roadless Rule would misdirect scarce resources. The Forest Service already carries a multibillion-dollar deferred maintenance backlog, more than half of it tied to the existing road system it struggles to maintain.[60] It makes far more sense to focus fuels reduction work in the Wildland-Urban Interface and to use the existing flexibility in the Roadless Rule, than to allow more roads. As noted by the Forest Service Chiefs in their recent comment letter, "Why invest in new roads when the Forest Service cannot maintain its existing infrastructure investments?"

BIGHORN MOUNTAINS, WYOMING
Sheridan's Close Call

To protect the water supply for Sheridan, Wyoming's 19,000 residents, the Bighorn National Forest implemented the Sheridan Watershed Municipal Project in 2021, a strategic fuels-reduction initiative that helped firefighters defend critical infrastructure during the 2024 Elk Fire. By prioritizing low-impact treatments across 15,000 acres of the Upper Big Goose Creek Watershed, including roadless areas, managers utilized manual thinning, "lop and scatter" methods, and broadcast burning to eliminate hazardous ladder fuels in roadless areas. This approach effectively avoided the erosion and high maintenance costs associated with heavy machinery. These defensible buffers played a role in preventing ash and sediment from crippling the city's water treatment plant showing that roadless areas can be managed to protect vital municipal infrastructure.

"My dad and I put in for 12 years to hunt the Elkhorns, and we were not disappointed. Even though the trailheads were packed, we rarely saw other hunters once we got into the roadless areas. On the opening morning of archery, I saw two six-point bulls fighting, and on the second day, I killed a great, mature bull. My dad killed one on the second day of the rifle opener. That was a pretty special opportunity to do those hunts with my dad." – Trey Curtiss, lifelong Montana hunter and angler

The Elkhorns

WINNING THE ELK LOTTERY

Montana's Elkhorn Mountains are legendary for producing record-book bulls. Each year, 10,000 hunters enter a lottery for just 100 coveted permits—making it the state's most sought-after tag.[61] Success rates here hover at 70%, vastly outperforming the state average of 20%.[62]

However, this wasn't always a hunter's paradise. In 1939, elk were nearly extinct in the area, necessitating a relocation of 34 animals from Yellowstone. As the herd recovered, over-hunting in the 1980s left biologists worried about a lack of mature, breeding males.

In 1981, rather than a wilderness designation, the Forest Service created the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit (WMU).[63] For this 175,000-acre area, wildlife habitat is the primary management objective.[64] Key highlights of this strategy include:

1. The Spike-Only Rule: Since 1987, general hunters can only take juvenile bulls, allowing mature bulls to thrive.

2. The Roadless Area: A 75,000-acre core provides secure habitat because research shows elk seek areas at least one mile from motorized routes to avoid hunting pressure.

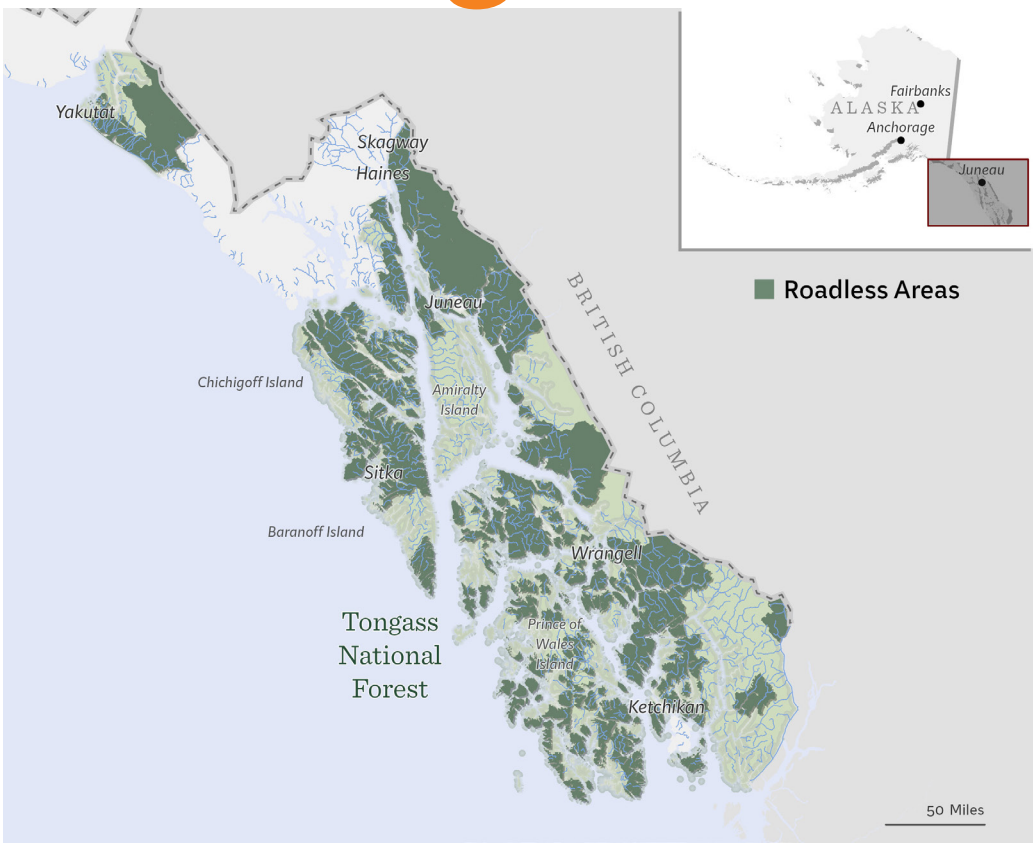
3. Population Health: The goal is a stable population of roughly 2,000 animals with a high bull-to-cow ratio.

The plan worked. Today, some bulls live 14 years or more. The success of the Elkhorns underscores a vital principle in roadless area management: elk security. Research specific to the Elkhorns shows that elk need and seek out areas that are, on average, more than a mile away from motorized routes.[65] By limiting road construction, these vast tracts prevent habitat fragmentation and reduce the displacement of elk onto private land, while also supporting other wildlife and native Westslope cutthroat trout. If hunters are lucky enough to draw a tag in the Elkhorns, hunting roadless areas is smart strategy for the bull of a lifetime.

"Chrome Chasers Fishing Lodge operates primarily in roadless areas of the national forest. These intact, undeveloped landscapes are essential to our business and to the health of Southeast Alaska's salmon and trout populations. Roadless areas provide critical spawning and rearing habitat, offering fish a refuge from habitat degradation and excessive human pressure. The wild character of these places is what sustains our fisheries, supports local outfitter-based economies, and allows future generations to experience world class fishing opportunities."

– Rick Matney, Chrome Chasers Lodge owner and guide, Wrangell, AK

The Tongass AMERICA'S LARGEST, FISHIEST FOREST



The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska contains 30% of the world's remaining temperate rainforests[66] and is the nation's top salmon-producing forest.[67] It holds some of the most productive habitat for brown bears and other wildlife. More than 70% of Chinook, coho, pink, and chum salmon, and over 65% of sockeye salmon and steelhead in the Tongass are found in areas without roads,[68] and the forest produces more wild salmon than all other national forests combined.[69]

The Roadless Rule safeguards the watersheds that sustain Southeast Alaska's economy and way of life. Sport, commercial, and subsistence fishing contribute about $1 billion annually,[70] and tourism adds another $1 billion.[71] Together they provide roughly 26% of regional employment, while the timber industry supplies only about 0.6%.[72]

The Tongass is already a working forest, and the Roadless Rule allows mining exploration, energy projects, and community infrastructure. As of June 2019, all 58 project applications in Alaska's roadless areas were approved, most within a month.[73]

Rescinding the Roadless Rule defies both economic reality and ecological necessity, especially in Alaska. By putting old-growth logging ahead of a thriving $2 billion visitor and seafood economy, it would undercut the region's financial backbone and ignore the clear will of Alaskans. Most critically, it jeopardizes the biological integrity of the Tongass—one of the planet's last great strongholds for wild trout and salmon.

$68 MILLION
Cost of USFS road maintenance backlog in Alaska[74]

65 STREAMS
in need of significant restoration for salmon[75]

1/3 FAIL
stream crossings that do not meet standards for fish migration[76]

96% SUPPORT
public comments supporting keeping the Roadless Rule in the Tongass[77]

The Uintas

UTAH'S ROADLESS HERITAGE

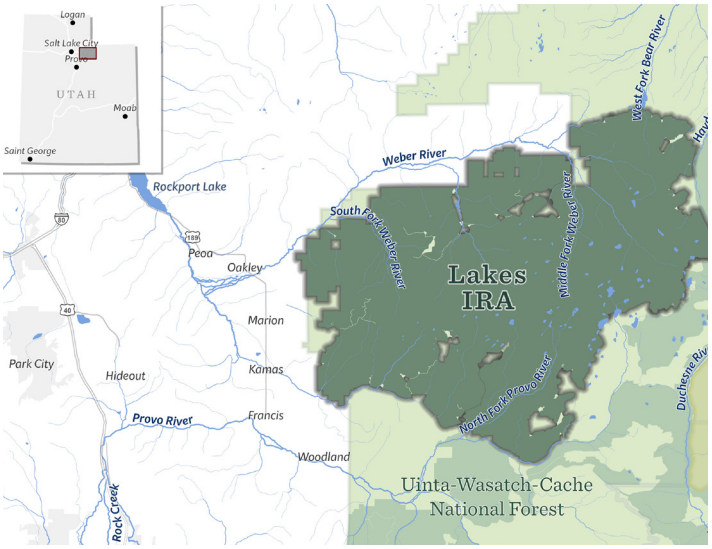
Utah's slickrock draws millions of tourists to national parks like Arches and Zion, but the state's roadless areas offer something altogether different. In a word, it's refuge. Nowhere is this more evident than the Lakes Roadless Area.

Located in the western Uinta Mountains, the 122,000-acre Lakes Roadless Area safeguards the headwaters of three major river systems: the Provo, Weber and Bear. Rising to nearly 12,000 feet, the roadless area features Bald Mountain, a popular hike off the Mirror Lake Highway, dozens of namesake lakes, and a unique refuge for fish, wildlife, hunters, and anglers.

Utah's state fish, the Bonneville cutthroat trout, relies on the cold, clean, high-elevation streams, including 59 miles of streams in the Lakes Roadless Area where these fish swim. In fact, 88% of all Bonneville Cutthroat trout conservation populations have tributaries in roadless areas, [78] where the absence of roads prevents sediment pollution and culvert fragmentation from destroying spawning habitat.

Utah roadless areas are also irreplaceable big game habitat: over 99% are designated by the state as crucial or substantial habitat for mule deer, including the Lakes Roadless Area, where 97.5% is crucial summer range.[79] With mule deer populations at just 73% of long-term goals, wildlife managers say growing those numbers is their top priority.[80] Habitat fragmentation from roads reduces habitat carrying capacity for deer and other wildlife, making roadless areas all the more important for hunters and wildlife alike.

The Lakes Roadless Area also highlights flexibility to actively manage roadless areas. This includes a series of collaborative projects as part of the Upper Provo Watershed Restoration Project that have treated over 11,000 acres of the roadless area to improve forest health.[81] These projects show the value of collaborative conservation, including multiple project partners working together through the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, as well as state/federal partnerships and funding, including the State of Utah and the Forest Service's successful shared stewardship agreement that has supported work in the upper Provo.



"The roadless areas surrounding the Uinta Mountains Wilderness Area act as a buffer protecting high value fish and wildlife habitats. The active management of these public lands reduces the fire risk that could impact multiple-use recreationalists. Limiting new road construction provides balanced land management that maintains water quality essential for healthy native trout populations and the habitats for deer and elk found throughout the Uinta Mountains. These roadless areas safeguard the headwaters that draw in anglers in the spring after runoff and provide clean, cold water to downstream watersheds throughout summer and fall."

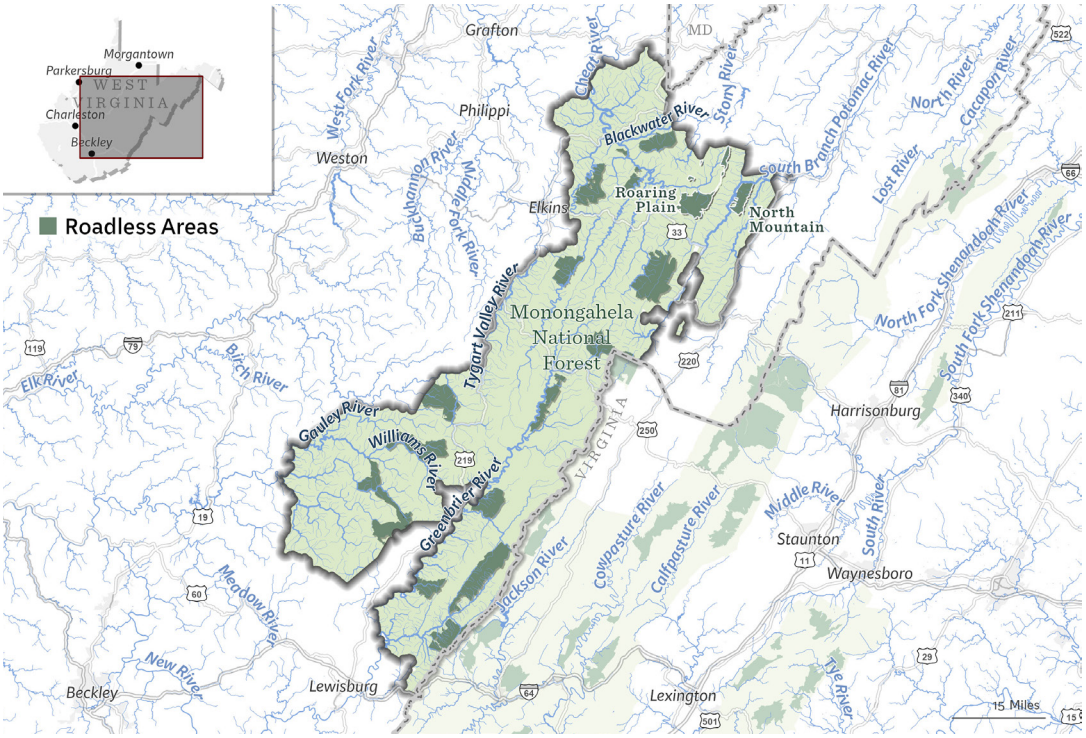
– Wes Johnson, Founder of the UDWR Blue Ribbon Fisheries Advisory Council and Trout Unlimited grassroots leader, South Weber, UT

The Monongahela

THE LAND OF FALLING BANKS

Named for the Lenape word meaning "falling banks," the 919,000-acre Monongahela National Forest is known locally as the Mon.

Once devastated by clear-cutting and fire, it has rebounded into a sanctuary for fish, wildlife, hunters, anglers, and other recreationists. Perhaps wildest of all? It's within a day's drive of half the U.S. population.



The health of the Mon hinges on 162,000 roadless acres protected by the 2001 Roadless Rule. The area's roadless designation resulted from a rare consensus between industry, conservationists, and local partners. The agreement ensures these areas remain manageable for fire and invasive species while preserving world-class brook trout fishing in places like the Seneca Creek Backcountry Area and critical wildlife corridors.

The Mon holds nearly 1,000 miles of some of the best brook trout habitat on the East Coast. As a vital headwater region, its streams are threatened by sedimentation from old, dilapidated roads. Highly intolerant of silt, brook trout depend on silt-free, deep pools to lay their eggs. Run-off from old roads suffocates their eggs buried in stream gravel.[82] New road construction only increases this threat.

Today, the Mon's economic focus has shifted dramatically towards the recreation economy. Visitors spend roughly $19.9 million annually, eclipsing natural gas sales, which, in 2015, were valued at just $245,000.[83] Hunting, fishing, and other recreation drive 29% of visits to the Mon.[84] Adding more roads to the existing 1,730-mile network[85] and its $43 million maintenance backlog[86] threatens this economic stability for the sake of outdated resource extraction.

For its part, Trout Unlimited and nearly 2,400 volunteers have invested heavily in restoring this resource, successfully reclaiming over 50 miles of unused roads and opening more than 35 miles of headwater streams by replacing culverts that blocked fish passage.[87] Quite simply, future conservation of the Mon requires removing barriers, not constructing new ones.

"Fishing and hunting are some of West Virginia's greatest pastimes, and the Roadless Rule is what holds it together. I caught my first trout in the Mon and return every year to fish, as do thousands of West Virginians. Roadless areas are not abstract policy—they are the reason these headwater streams function again as living systems rather than drainage ditches. The fishing has just gotten better since the Roadless Rule was in place."
– Paul McKay, Trout Unlimited board member, Wheeling, WV

The Roadless Rule:
Protecting America's Sporting Strongholds

The 58.5 million acres protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule provide productive, indispensable habitat to the fish and wildlife that call these lands home. These areas represent just 10% of the National Forest System, yet they provide disproportionate economic, biological, and recreational value. As this report illustrates, maintaining strong safeguards for roadless areas is not just fiscally sound; it also helps to ensure the long-term viability of native fish and game populations. The research, much of it provided by state and federal agencies, shows that maintaining large, unfragmented roadless areas is the most effective and cost-efficient form of conservation. In terms of aquatic habitat, water quality, wildlife security, and hunting quality, roadless areas are second to none.

The guiding principle established by the Roadless Rule, to maintain these areas for their wild character, is sound. By upholding the rule and prioritizing the repair and decommissioning of obsolete roads in existing roaded areas, managers can actively mitigate ongoing habitat threats.

Roadless areas—and the benefits they provide to hunters, anglers and the American public—are the result of sound policy and overwhelming public support for conservation. Safeguarding these lands ensures they remain a great place to hunt and fish. These are places set aside for future generations of American hunters and anglers, so that they may chase elk and cast for native trout in the calm and quiet experienced by the generations that preceded them. Continuation of the Roadless Rule is the most vital investment we can make in the future of our sporting lands.

Citations:

Every River Needs A Champion