

Roadless areas are nature's climate solutions

Pristine areas must protected from relentless development

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The 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Alliance of World Scientists, and #Scientists4Future all warn that if we do not transition away from fossil fuels quickly, climate change will threaten civilization itself in the coming decades. Scientists are now saying that pristine areas, like roadless areas and unlogged forests, can buy us time as we transition to a carbon-free economy but only if protected from relentless development.

Unfortunately, the fate of millions of acres of roadless areas in Alaska and Utah is now at risk from the Trump administration's efforts to upend one of the nation's landmark conservation achievements – the Roadless Area Conservation Rule of 2000. This is coming at a time when we need every wild place to avoid an unprecedented global crisis of 1 million species extinctions, as the authoritative Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services recently warned.

Anyone in the Bay Area who cares about wild spaces ought to be alarmed by the pending extinction crisis and the administration's efforts to usher in clearcut logging and road building in Alaska's coastal temperate rainforests and Utah's roadless forests. Here's why.

Muir Woods National Monument, just north of San Francisco, marks the trailing edge of a dense-rainforest corridor stretching from the redwoods into the Pacific Northwest and coastal British Columbia and Alaska. In addition to attracting millions of visitors, these ancient forests function as a regionwide carbon warehouse, quietly absorbing and storing more carbon per acre than just about any forest on Earth. Forests are a vital cog in the global atmospheric carbon cycle, always working in the background toward climate stabilization. They do this most effectively in unlogged areas and in massive redwoods and towering spruce forests. When cut down and transported on logging trucks to timber mills for processing, forests release some two-thirds of their stored carbon as global warming pollution. This is why keeping carbon in the forests for as long as possible is buying transition time as nature's climate solution.

Utah's roadless landscapes also provide critical climate benefits that support 133 imperiled species and supply clean drinking water for cities and agricultural lands. They help reduce flood waters associated with intense monsoons and limit erosion from logging and road building. Keeping these areas intact may lessen western water-wars as the climate increasingly produces droughts, while saving taxpayer money by avoiding expensive removal of sediment build up in reservoirs from excessive road building and logging.

Fortunately, in early May, Senator Maria Cantwell and Rep. Ruben Gallego introduced the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2019 to codify roadless area protections nationwide that have been in place for two decades and that received

overwhelming public and scientific support. Representative Nancy Pelosi would demonstrate much needed congressional leadership by working to advance this legislation at a time when the nation desperately needs natural climate solutions to avoid an uncertain future. California leads the nation in calling attention to climate change as reflected in last year's Global Climate Action Summit. It's time California's elected officials take this message to heart by supporting protection for our remaining wild areas.

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