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Comments: Logging is not the answer for fire prevention and that our economy is built on recreation and tourism, not timber. Park County Environmental Council

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TAKE ACTION: Defend Park County's Local Forests

The debate over the future of Montana's public lands is at a critical juncture once again. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is moving forward with plans to rescind the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, or "Roadless Rule," which would locally impact roughly 1.6 million acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) in the Custer Gallatin National Forest surrounding Park County.

If you have spent any time exploring Park County's public lands, chances are you were hiking or hunting in a designated roadless area, or next to one. Whether you realized it or not, the 2001 Roadless Rule has protected tens of millions of acres of public lands across the West and in Montana from needless development.

Keep reading to learn how your comment can be most effective and more about the local impact of this decision.

Areas protected by the Roadless Rule in and adjacent to Park County shown in brown.

The public comment period is currently open, and we need your help sharing the local perspective by September 19th.

We urge all of our members to write their own comment, make it personal, and fight for the protection our public lands need. Our community comments will inform the proposed rule, accompanied by a draft EIS in March 2026 with a request for final public comment. The final rule, EIS, and record of decision are expected to be released late 2026.

Your personal story and connection to these wild places truly make a difference. By sharing your experience by September 19th, you can voice your opposition and highlight why these roadless areas are so important to us as Park County residents.

Tips for Your Comment:

Focus on local impact. Mention areas you use and love, like the Crazy Mountains, Mill Creek, West Pine, or Hidden Lakes.

Highlight the benefits. Explain how these areas are crucial for our clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, and local economy.

Debunk the myths. Emphasize that logging is not the answer for fire prevention and that our economy is built on recreation and tourism, not timber.

Call to action. Urge the USDA to maintain the Roadless Rule to protect these landscapes for future generations.

Local Impact in Park County

When we talk about what's most at risk, the Crazy Mountains immediately come to mind. Here, the Roadless Rule serves as an essential layer of protection. Due to its checkerboarded landscape, it is quite vulnerable to road building, especially if demand arises for access to private sections within the range. It could open these lands to amenity development, mining, and industrial-scale logging. In the Crazies, road construction would permanently alter the landscape.

But the Crazies are just one piece of the puzzle. Other important roadless areas in and around Park County are also at risk. This includes the public lands surrounding the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, especially on the western flank of the Absarokas in Paradise Valley, Mill Creek, Suce Creek, large portions of the Gallatins, and areas around Cooke City and Jardine.

The Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area is vital for habitat and water resources in the Gallatins, in addition to the Bridger and Madison Ranges, which are all connected to our local ecosystem and ultimately our local economy. Other affected cherished areas include Cowboy Heaven, and Hidden Lakes, most of the north and west side of the AB wilderness. All would be severely compromised if we lose the Roadless Rule.

This threat is not hypothetical. We recently submitted an official objection to a major logging project outside of Cooke City, adjacent to the roadless areas there, and we've heard of a new logging project being proposed near Jardine. These are projects that could be detrimental to the health of our forests and our water resources, especially if Roadless Rule protection is removed. Many more projects like them will follow, allowing new roads to fragment these habitats, disrupt migration corridors, and increase human-wildlife conflict. Arguments for repealing the Roadless Rule are often presented as necessary to prevent catastrophic wildfires and boost local economies. These claims are not supported by data or scientific consensus. It is important to recognize that the stated shift in federal priorities toward timber harvest is a clear step toward logging previously designated critical habitat, a move that many fire ecologists and forestry experts argue can actually increase wildfire risk. Ultimately,

do not rescind the Roadless Rule. Leave well enough alone.