

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8031

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation, February 1, 2006

Brief Description: Requesting federal action on inventoried roadless areas.

Sponsors: Senator Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 1/30/06, 2/1/06 [DP, DNP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair; Oke, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser and Spanel.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Morton and Stevens.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Swecker.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: On January 12, 2001, the Department of Agriculture adopted regulations, known as the roadless rule, that generally prohibited road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest in areas identified as inventoried roadless areas within National Forest lands. Exceptions to these general prohibitions were created, such as where a road is necessary for public safety, where a road is necessary to conduct an environmental cleanup project, or where timber harvest would improve the habitat of a fish or wildlife species.

Washington State contains over nine million acres of National Forest land, including over two million acres designated as inventoried roadless areas.

On May 13, 2005, the Department of Agriculture adopted new roadless rules that set out a procedure for state specific rulemaking to address the management of inventoried roadless areas. The new rules allow governors to petition the Secretary of Agriculture to establish regulations for the management of roadless areas within their states by submitting required materials to the Secretary no later than November 13, 2006.

On November 1, 2005, the Governor of Washington State requested that the Secretary of Agriculture create a streamlined process by which states might adopt the protections of the 2001 roadless rule on National Forest lands within their boundaries.

Summary of Bill: The federal government is requested to, by legislation or rule, either (1) reinstate the protections of the 2001 roadless rule for inventoried roadless areas or (2) adopt a streamlined process by which states can opt to retain the protections of the 2001 roadless rule for roadless areas within their boundaries.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Testimony For: The 2001 roadless rule was based on a great deal of scientific study and the largest rulemaking process in federal history. The restoration of the protections of the 2001 rule to Washington will benefit water quality and other natural resources. Because the current petition process is cumbersome and expensive, the federal government should create a more streamlined process.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Stephen Bernath, Department of Ecology; Bill Robinson, The Nature Conservancy.