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November 12, 2004

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
c/o USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 221090
Salt Lake City, UT 84122

Dear Secretary Veneman:

As representatives of the faith community, we urge you to retain the protections guaranteed by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and withdraw proposals that would undermine this landmark conservation initiative.

Over the years, members of the faith community have written letters, attended meetings, and testified in hearings about the theological, spiritual, and ecological importance of safeguarding pristine forests. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, enacted in 2001 to protect 58.5 million acres of public forests from additional road-building and logging, was developed after years of discussion and millions of public comments. We continue to believe the Rule is sound policy and reflects our responsibility to be good stewards of God's world.

In ever-growing and deepening circles, religious traditions are responding to God's call to care for the earth. As the Scriptures tell us, the earth is not ours, but God's: "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24:1-2). And in receiving God's gifts of the created world, we are instructed to "tend and keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15).

As people of faith, we humbly recognize that we are but a part of the interdependent web of life, entrusted by God with the obligation to protect all of creation. Protection of these pristine forests provides needed habitat for fragile species, safeguards water by protecting rivers and streams, and preserves areas for recreation, reflection and renewal for this and future generations. For these reasons, among others, thousands of voices from the faith community have joined the chorus of those demanding protection of national forest roadless areas.

Today, we reiterate our support for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and ask that you withdraw proposed regulations that would put at risk millions of acres of our nation's wild forests.

Sincerely,

J. Daryl Byler
Director
Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office

Marie Dennis
Director
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

The Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory
Director - Washington Office
Presbyterian Church (USA)

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