



USDA FOREST SERVICE

Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

## Inventoried Roadless Areas & Wilderness

Within the Blue Mountains Forests, there are 79 Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA's) totaling almost 970,129 acres – 17% of the national forest area.

IRAs are undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process, subsequent assessments, or forest planning.

Direction in the existing Forest Plans includes guidance to manage some of the IRAs for resources that would preclude roadless management. Direction included proposed development in some of the IRAs for timber management. The projected amounts of timber harvest and road construction from these areas has not occurred.

In the MALHEUR Forest Plan 101,094 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 79,854 acres were categorized as unavailable for development.

In the UMATILLA Forest Plan, 86,100 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 195,000 acres were categorized as unavailable for development.

In the WALLOWA-WHITMAN Forest Plan (outside of HCNRA) 130,510 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 121,470 acres were categorized as unavailable for development.

### Laws and Regulations

The purpose of wilderness and the broad direction for managing wilderness are stated in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Further requirements for evaluation and designation of wilderness are in 36 Code of Federal Regulations CFR 219.17, Forest Service Manual 2320, and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 7.

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was published in the Federal Register (FR Doc. 01-17249). This rule prohibits road construction, road re-construction, and timber harvest in IRAs on NFS Lands. The intent of this rule is to provide lasting protection for IRAs within the NFS in the context of multiple use management (Federal Register, 2001).

On May 10, 2001, the U. S. District Court for the District of Idaho enjoined the USDA from implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This decision by the District Court was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

On June 7, 2001, the Chief of the Forest Service and Secretary of Agriculture issued a letter concerning interim protection of IRAs, stating "the Forest Service is committed to protecting and managing roadless areas as an important component of the NFS. The best way to achieve this objective is to ensure that we protect and sustain roadless values until they can be appropriately considered through forest planning". (Bosworth 2001)

On December 12, 2002 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the May 10, 2001 ruling by the U.S. District Court that had enjoined USDA from implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

At this time, the Court is still considering a rehearing request. They have not yet issued a mandate to lift the injunction, therefore the Forest Service remains enjoined from implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. As long as the Roadless Area Conservation Rule is not in effect, the agency policy for the protection and management of Inventoried Roadless Areas is contained in the Interim Direction.

Currently, we are not implementing the Roadless Area Conservation Rule because of legal issues. The Forest Service has established interim guidance for the management of IRAs to ensure that these areas are protected until the current legal issues are resolved and national guidance is finalized. Until that time, we will continue to evaluate these roadless areas through our Forest Plan Revision Process.