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Idaho Ditches Roadless Protection: Major Loss for Hunters, Anglers, Wildlife, Economy

For Immediate Release

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Boise, ID—Today Jim Risch became the first Governor in the U.S. to petition the Forest Service to remove roadless protection from federal forests. Risch submitted his petition today to remove protection from millions of acres of Idaho's 9.3 million acres of roadless forests. Idaho is second only to Alaska in roadless acreage.

Idahoans—recreationists and conservationists alike—are speaking out about the impact the Idaho petition may have on fish and wildlife habitat and on the economy of Idaho.

“There is no question that Idaho's roadless lands are the heart of the most productive fish and wildlife populations and highest quality hunting and fishing experiences” said Tom Kovalicky, a retired Forest Supervisor and volunteer with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), a non-profit organization that works to improve high-quality hunting and fishing opportunities for the average American.

“It's absolutely time for hunters and anglers to tell politicians to take back the National Forests from uses that abuse the land and keep them in the highest quality possible for hunting and fishing” added Kovalicky.

“The best elk, mule-deer and bird hunting is in roadless areas. It's just the best habitat for big game and bird hunting,” said Nampa resident Art Talsma, an accomplished hunter, angler and a volunteer for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. “Roads and prime wildlife habitat just don't mix,” added Talsma.

“The Boise National Forest has plenty of roads,” said Boise resident Kip Burden. “I've been fishing and hunting in the Boise all my life and I get out of my car and walk when I hunt or fish—like it's supposed to be.”

In comments sent to individual county commissions the Southwest Idaho Fish and Game Department wrote that “These roadless areas generally contain the headwaters of many important watersheds, hence protecting water quality for maintaining anadromous and sensitive fish species. The economic importance of maintaining these species habitats has become obvious the past few years in New Meadows (Adams Co.), Riggins (Idaho Co.) and Cascade (Valley Co.)”.

According to a 2004 study conducted by the Boise National Forest there are 1,741 road-crossings on fish-bearing streams within the forest and 90% of them are impassable to all life stages of fish. At the same time, Idaho has a \$660 million backlog in the maintenance budget needed to maintain roads in safe and usable condition.

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“The last thing that Idaho’s Forest Service needs is new road construction or any other activity that will generate and accelerate sedimentation in Idaho Rivers,” said Roy Heberger, a retired Idaho Fish and Wildlife biologist. “We’ve had plenty of that already; that’s why you see those ‘nice’ beaches as you drive along the main Salmon River up- and downstream of Riggins and why the Corps of Engineers is having to address the dredging of the upper end of Lower Granite Reservoir,” added Heberger.

“Idaho is completely out of step with the rest of the nation on this issue. Our roadless areas are critical habitat for wildlife and our economy depends on the revenue brought into the State by hunters, anglers, and many other recreationists,” said Craig Gehrke, regional director for The Wilderness Society. “Governor Risch passed up his opportunity to maintain Idaho as a recreation destination,” added Gehrke.

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