

New rules may put national forests at risk

By Gretchen Weber, Climate Watch

Environmental groups are criticizing the Obama Administration's new proposed rules for managing the country's nearly 200 million acres of national forest, arguing that they weaken current standards for protecting wildlife and watersheds.

More than 100 organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and Defenders of Wildlife, signed on to a letter sent to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack on Monday, arguing that the proposal "fails to provide critical, concrete protections for the most precious resources of our forests – water and wildlife," and that it "weakens the strong standards for safeguarding water quality and wildlife viability first issued in 1982 by the Reagan Administration and currently still in place."

In a February press release announcing the new proposed rules, the USDA (which manages the Forest Service) touted the new proposal as creating increased protections for water resources and an "improved ability to respond to climate change and other stressors through provisions to restore and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems."

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