

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PHOTOS AND B-ROLL AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

Event Contact: Melanie Schlotterbeck
Power in Nature Southland Regional Lead
714-501-3133 (cell)

Roadless Rule Contact: Mary Lunetta
CA Conservation Strategist for Sierra Club
520-252-2335 (cell)

Residents and Recreationalists Rally to Oppose the Forest Service's Proposed Rollback of the Roadless Rule

Orange County's Most Wild and Scenic Landscapes at Risk of Development With Minimal Public Input

May 7, 2026, TRABUCO CANYON - Today, surrounded by nature, over a hundred recreational users, families, conservationists, naturalists, scientists, and more are gathering to Rally for Nature at O'Neill Regional Park to oppose the proposed rollback of the Roadless Rule. Attendees aim to raise awareness about the Federal proposal to end the 2001 Roadless Rule protections for nearly 60 million acres of the nation's beloved wilderness areas.

"The Roadless Rule keeps big, unbroken forestlands intact, providing high-quality habitat and migration corridors for hundreds of vulnerable wildlife and plant species," says **Steve Messer, from the California Mountain Biking Coalition**. "It sustains outdoor recreation and local economies—hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, and tourism—by keeping backcountry landscapes wild and quiet."



A view looking north of the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District and its densely covered chaparral habitat.

PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

When the Roadless Rule was first established, the U.S. Forest Service held more than 400 public hearings and received millions of public comments. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has not yet released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement, opened a comment period, or held any public hearings on the rule change, so this public rally gives residents the opportunity to voice their concerns. Local residents who weren't able to attend the event are encouraged to submit a comment at roadless.org/.

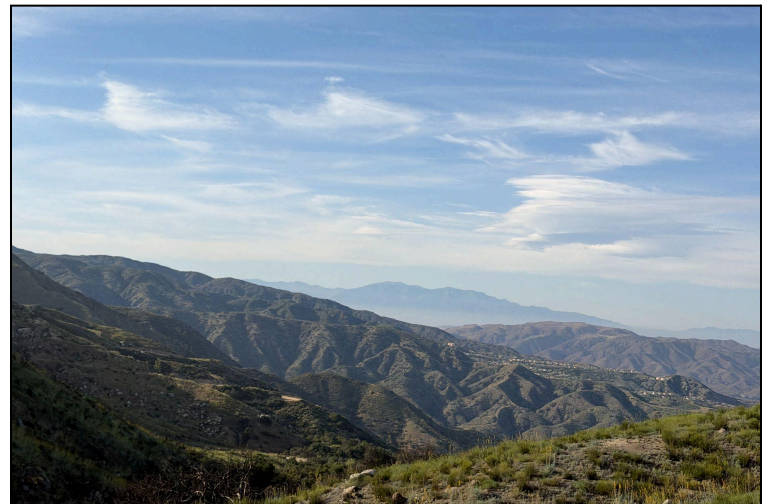
The Roadless Rule was adopted as a Forest Service regulation to keep remaining undeveloped national forest lands road-free. These protections safeguard habitat, including many sensitive,

threatened, and endangered plants and animals. In the Santa Ana Mountains, mountain lions, mule deer, ringtailed cats, golden eagles, and numerous habitats would be impacted by removing Roadless Rule protections. These areas are close to pristine, with high-quality streams, places to enjoy nature, and safeguards from wildfire ignitions, as roads increase the likelihood of fires. Currently, the Trump Administration is advancing a nationwide rescission of the Roadless Rule that would reopen public lands to new roads and to logging.

“The Trabuco District is the northernmost district of the Cleveland National Forest, which straddles the Orange and Riverside County boundary and will be impacted by a Roadless Rule rescission. This District includes more than 138,000 acres with 40,000 acres of roadless wilderness. Area residents have a lot to lose if the Roadless Rule rescission goes into effect,” said **Joel Robinson, from Naturalist For You**. “Loss of the wilderness and Roadless Rule means recreational impacts, water quality degradation, loss of sensitive habitat, and more costs for the federal government to maintain new roads. Not to mention the increased threat of wildfires, as new roads are added.”

The Roadless Rule applies to roughly 30% of all National Forest System lands across more than 40 states. Right now, there are limits on the creation of new roads and most timber harvests in designated roadless areas, helping maintain intact habitat, clean water, and backcountry recreation while still allowing some exceptions (e.g., firefighting, existing leases, public safety, certain restoration work).

“For two decades, the Roadless Rule has protected some of our most pristine and resilient forest landscapes, including millions of acres right here in California. Rolling it back would open the door to new roads, logging, and fragmentation in places that are critical for clean water, wildlife habitat, and wildfire resilience. At a time when communities are facing the impacts of climate change, this is the wrong direction,” says **Mary Lunetta, California Conservation Strategist, Sierra Club**.



A view looking at the rugged hillsides and canyons of the Trabuco District. PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

Further, the Rule supports climate resilience by conserving mature, carbon-rich forests and shrublands that store greenhouse gases and buffer communities from wildfire, drought, and floods. It also protects clean drinking water and healthy watersheds by reducing road-caused erosion, sediment, and pollution from flowing into creeks downstream of the National Forests. It is fiscally smart to maintain the Roadless Rule, avoiding billions in road-building and maintenance costs while delivering large ecosystem service benefits each year.

“San Mateo Creek is considered the most pristine coastal stream south of the Santa Monica Mountains, with no major dams or diversions. Together with nearby protected lands, the wilderness anchors a large habitat block that supports wide-ranging species like mountain lion, mule deer, golden eagle, and rare species such as southern steelhead trout, California gnatcatcher, coastal cactus wren, and arroyo toad,” said **Melanie Schlotterbeck, from Hills For Everyone**. “Keeping this area roadless and intact is critical for regional wildlife connectivity, clean water to the coast, and the long-term health of south-coastal California ecosystems.”

San Mateo Canyon Wilderness is a lower-elevation wild core in the southern Santa Ana Mountains, protecting one of the last intact coastal watersheds in Southern California. The wilderness holds a mosaic of chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, native and non-native grasslands, and rich riparian woodlands along San Mateo Creek and its side canyons. These shady stream corridors act as cool oases in a typically hot, dry landscape.



These rugged hillsides provide important habitat for wildlife and birds, as well as many recreational opportunities for area residents including hiking, camping, birdwatching and more.

PHOTO CREDIT: HILLS FOR EVERYONE

In 2020, the Forest Service finalized a rule exempting all 9.3 million acres of the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Rule, opening it to road-building and logging. They then moved to extend this decision to other roadless forests, announcing in August 2025 that they would prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and propose to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule, signaling an intent to drop protections on nearly 60 million acres, excluding only Colorado and Idaho (which have their own state-specific rules).

The repeal would remove prohibitions on road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest on almost 60 million acres of national forests, including about 4.4 million acres in California, and

over 40,000 acres here in Orange County.

Local residents who weren't able to attend the event are encouraged to submit a comment at <https://roadless.org/>.

###

About the Power In Nature Coalition

Power In Nature is a statewide coalition of over 250 community groups, environmental and conservation organizations, land trusts, Indigenous organizations, and Tribal members dedicated to advancing California's 30x30 commitment. The Power In Nature coalition has identified nearly 100 potential 30x30 projects across the state and works on a broad range of issues, including biodiversity protection, climate resilience, equity, recreation, outdoor access, and social justice. For more information, visit PowerInNature.org.

About Hills For Everyone (HFE)

For more than 45 years, Hills For Everyone (HFE) has worked to preserve the unique and disappearing landscapes of the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor. HFE founded Chino Hills State Park, which connects to the Cleveland National Forest at Coal Canyon Biological Corridor. Its staff serves as the Power In Nature Southland Regional Lead to help implement 30x30 across Southern California. Learn more at: HillsForEveryone.org.