

Our National Forests were established at the close of the nineteenth century to protect public forest lands from destruction by the timber companies. Loggers had already stripped bare much of the East and the upper Midwest. They had polluted rivers and fishing streams with silt eroding from the clearcuts and logging roads.

Today our 156 National Forests encompass 191 million acres, an area equal to Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota combined! These forests contain some of the most striking natural beauty on earth.

But some Members of Congress have forgotten why the National Forests exist. Representative Don Young of Alaska, for example, said, "The Forest Service exists to cut trees. If they're not doing it, why not get rid of them?"

In truth, the Forest Service is bound by law to manage the National Forests for all their values: to preserve wildlife habitat, to protect watersheds, to provide recreation, as well as to furnish timber.

But because Congress constantly pressures the Forest Service to spend more money on logging, the Forest Service has come to ignore other forest uses.

As a result of this narrow-minded "timber-first" management policy, the Forest Service is selling timber off the majority of our National Forests so fast and so cheap that the price doesn't even cover the cost of selling the trees. The Forest Service's own studies show that in 1992 timber sales on more than two-thirds of our National Forests lost money!

Yet, responding to congressional pressure rather than the public trust, the Forest Service continues to cut the forests much faster than they can recover.

By the year 2000, they plan to build or rebuild 380,000 miles of roads through our National Forests -- more than eight times the length of the entire Interstate Highway System! Many of those logging roads will obliterate scenic hiking trails, increase erosion into pristine streams, fragment wildlife habitat and provide easier access for poachers who prey on the National Forest wildlife.

A rational, carefully managed timber program can harvest timber economically from the National Forests while protecting the environment. That's what the Forest Service should be doing.

*But isn't it!*

And that's what The Wilderness Society's National Forests Campaign is all about!

I hope you will join me as a member of The Wilderness Society, the leading national conservation organization protecting our public lands. Since 1935, we've been defending our National Forests with professionalism and dedication, just as we protect our National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and the other wild lands in America's natural inheritance.