**Roadless Petition 101**

 In addition to recent rumblings about the Roadless Rule, you may have also heard about Utah Governor Gary Herbert’s effort to petition the Forest Service for a Utah-specific version of the Roadless Rule. This process has been initiated because, according to the State, local firefighting operations are apparently restricted in their duties because of the protection statuses within roadless areas. The Governor’s Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO) has asked all of the 29 counties in Utah to participate in the petition process, which involves an inventory and review of all the currently designated roadless areas within each county, as well as providing recommendations to either maintain the current designation or reclassify the area.

*Why is the State petitioning the Forest Service?*

 Due to increasing severity of human-caused and naturally-caused wildfire, as well as the heightened fire risk in our state, the State is asking for more flexibility regarding the management of roadless areas. For instance, in areas where road construction is allowed, all roads are not allowed to be more than 50 inches wide. According to the State, this slows down the removal of dead timber, which can act as fuel for wildfires, as well as limits firefighting access. Additionally, the removal of dead timber is fully possible, allowed, and implemented, but due to the slow nature of the task is not commonly carried out. The petition would also allow for an increase in logging in order to manage the fire risk within roadless areas, and has been touted as something that could boost Utah’s economy… even though we have quite a small timber industry.

*What is the petition process?*

 The state’s petition is derived from these review processes, as well as public comments, and is submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture. The time that it takes to craft and submit a petition, in addition to the federal rulemaking process, can take anywhere from three to five years. Unfortunately, Utah’s lands are still at risk of wildfire within that timeframe, so more proactive steps should be taken to protect our land.

*Has this petition process happened before?*

 This petition process has happened before; Idaho and Colorado have both submitted petitions to the federal government in years past, and were successful in getting the Roadless Rule amended within their states. Idaho petitioned for amendments to 9.3 million acres of forest, and eventually adopted the less-restrictive rules. Alaska is currently in the process of submitting a petition to the Forest Service as well. Utah’s petition is somewhat hurried; the federal rulemaking process is time consuming, and because there is already a team working on Alaska’s petition, the State is under pressure to get theirs submitted soon so that the existing team can work on both petitions.

*What are the potential outcomes following the petition?*

 Analysis is done by roadless unit, not by forest. Each forest contains multiple roadless units, so changes would not necessarily take effect within an entire forest. There are three “levels” of designation that pertain to roadless areas and how they are managed, and five outcomes that could result from the successful implementation of Utah’s petition:

1. Status Quo Option
	1. The status quo option simply means that the designation and management procedures assigned to a certain roadless area will stay the same as they currently are.
2. Primitive Areas; the most restrictive management rules
	1. In Primitive Areas, road construction is prohibited, timber management is allowed for personal use only, mineral development (beyond existing rights) is prohibited, motorized travel will be limited to existing routes.
3. Forest Restoration Areas; moderately restrictive management rules
	1. In Forest Restoration Areas, there is a preference toward temporary road construction (when needed), commercial timber harvest is allowed for improving forest health only, mineral extraction is allowed, and motorized travel is limited to existing routes. Watershed and vegetative restoration is accomplished through active management and natural processes.
4. Forest Stewardship Areas; the least restrictive management rules
	1. Permanent road construction is allowed (although temporary roads are preferred), a full range of silviculture techniques are allowed, mineral extraction is allowed, and motorized travel is allowed per Forest Travel Plans. Watershed and vegetation management is primarily accomplished through active management processes such as timber harvest, fuel reduction, and grazing.
5. Re-Inventory/Boundary Adjustment; slated to be removed from Roadless Rule
	1. The fourth possible outcome resulting from this petition is that existing roadless areas could have their boundaries redrawn or removed entirely from the Roadless Rule. The reasoning for this reclassification is often due to high presence of roads, motorized trails, energy infrastructure, and other features that disrupt roadless values.

Ideally, the petition will fail and the State can focus their efforts on combating Utah’s wildfires in the areas that truly need it, rather than disrupting precious ecosystems and recreation areas. This is the result that would be best for our natural areas, the public, and the safety of those threatened by wildfire.