

GOP angry over Clinton road ban in national forests

Logging, mining interests join call to overturn lame duck act

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Hailed by environmentalists, President Clinton's road and logging ban on federal forests unleashed furious criticism Friday from Western Republican lawmakers, who pledged to try to get it overturned.

President-elect Bush has not said whether he would try to roll back the new forest restrictions, but during his campaign he suggested the proposal - announced more than a year ago - paid too little attention to concerns of Western states and the impact on logging and other industries.

Bush transition spokesman Ari Fleischer refused to speculate on Bush's course but did say of Clinton's rush of regulations in the final weeks of his presidency: "We will review them all."

With a backdrop of snow-dusted red cedar and magnolia trees at the National Arboretum, Clinton approved the new U.S. Forest Service regulations that will ban road building and most logging in nearly a third of the federal forest land in 38 states.

In Tennessee, the plan was expected to affect about 85,000 acres - or 14 percent - of the Cherokee National Forest.

"Today we preserve the final frontier of America's national forest for our children," Clinton told a group of about 150 people, many of them environmental leaders who compared the road and logging ban to President Theodore Roosevelt's creation of the national forest system nearly a century ago.

But the forest protection plan brought sharp criticism from Republicans on Capitol Hill.

"This is the last gasp of a

hostile Clinton agenda to drive people off their public lands," fumed Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo., complaining that the action will "wall off" the public from millions of acres of federal forest.

Rep. James Hansen, R-Utah, the new chairman of the House Resources Committee, promised a "vigorous congressional review," with an eye toward trying to over-

turn the rule in the 60-day time frame provided by a 1996 law.

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, promised to "leave no stone unturned" in his effort to reverse Clinton's action. Craig said he is confident it will be blocked by the courts. Timber, mining and energy industries as well as some

Western states are expected to challenge the restrictions.

Under the Clinton forest management plan, the U.S. Forest Service will ban road-building on 58.5 million acres of federal forest land where no roads currently exist, including nearly 15 million acres in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

The regulations also will limit future logging in those areas to activities that "restore and preserve" the forest, although commercial timber contracts already in the government pipeline will be allowed to go through. In some cases, that could amount to continued logging for six to seven more years at today's harvesting rates, officials acknowledged.

While critics, including the timber, mining and energy industries, have attacked the plan as shortsighted and a threat to loggers, the administration maintains the economic impact will be slight.

Less than 5 percent of the timber from federal forests comes from roadless areas, the White House said.

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