

OP-ED

President's roadless plan too confining for future generations

By Matt Bennett

In the legal parlance of estate planning, the term "dead-hand control" refers to one generation's attempt to control the future of another from the grave. For the obvious reason that we can never know what circumstances future generations might face, most attorneys advise against it.

Yet in preparing to designate another 60 million acres of our national forests as permanently roadless, this is precisely what the Clinton administration is preparing to do, and it should not be allowed to succeed.

Seeking support, the administration has argued (as it has on every issue from higher taxes to gun control) that we need to set aside these roadless areas for the children. Likewise, environmentalists often cite the seven-generations concept of the Iroquois nation, asking that we consider the implications of our actions seven generations removed.

These environmentalists, convinced that our generation lives at the expense of the next, hope that trans-generational guilt will lead to policies more to their liking.



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No matter how charming the notion, if we reverse the exercise and think backward seven generations, we can see the obvious shortcomings of the idea.

If policies common 150 years ago had been perpetuated until today, slavery would still exist, women would not be allowed to vote and forests would be cut as fast as possible to clear the land for farming.

And, while environmentalists point to polls that indicate the public's support of the roadless policy, I suspect polls taken 150 years ago would have shown support for the above policies too: policies that now seem terribly inappropriate.

The truth these examples illustrate is that our ancestors could not see the future, and neither can we. We can know neither the demands nor the emergencies future generations may face.

Setting aside these lands as permanently roadless would be a terrible mistake, tying the hands of future generations and denying them the freedom and the choice to make their own decisions. In other words, we would be controlling them from the grave.

Today, experts point out that as many as 65 million acres of our national forest are at risk from wildfire and disease. They also point to wildlife and plant species at risk due to the aging of our forests. Consequently, most reject the notion that public forests should be left unmanaged.

Yet, the president's plan makes that naïve idea a

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virtual certainty. For that reason, the wildlife directors of five southern states, Tennessee included, have publicly expressed their concerns about the plan.

Because flexibility is the most necessary attribute of long-range planning, the lack of it in the president's roadless plan makes it woefully inadequate to meet the needs of future generations.

What we need is management that requires the U.S. Forest Service to develop a plan every 10-15 years for each national forest that will meet the public's needs while protecting the long-term health and condition of the forests.

Incorporating local input and sound science, these plans would recognize that both forests and society are dynamic and changing over time. Most of all, these plans would refrain from giving the current generation irrevocable control over subsequent ones. Their legacy would be their flexibility.

This may sound too good to be true, but actually it is pretty much the way the forest service does it now. The president's new plan actually excludes the public from the decision-making process, not just this generation but for all those that follow.

If you believe that each generation deserves the right to make its own decision, then please contact the forest service at the address below. Tell them

that you oppose the president's roadless plan and support instead Alternative 1, which preserves the current planning process.

Tell them that future generations should have the freedom to choose their options instead of being forced to accept one mandated by Bill Clinton and Al Gore.

The address for comment: USDA Forest Service-CAET; Attn: Roadless Area Proposed Rule; P.O. Box 221090; Salt Lake City, Utah 84122. The fax number is 1-877-703-2494, and the e-mail address is www.roadless.fs.fed.us.

Matt Bennett is vice-president of sales for Emmet Vaughn Lumber Co. and the past president of the Tennessee Forestry Association and past chairman of the Kentucky-Tennessee Society of American Foresters.

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