

# FRIENDS OF DOUGLAS-FIR NATIONAL MONUMENT

## Dispatch, August, 2025: Exploring and Protecting Roadless Areas

### Exploring the Proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument: Iron Mountain-Cone Peak and the surrounding roadless area



Wildflowers in their spring glory on Iron Mountain in the proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument, Oregon.

Photo Credit: George Wuerthner (first appeared in *Oregon Wild: Endangered Forest Wilderness* (Timber Press 2004))

Whenever someone discusses the glories of the proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument, the Iron Mountain-Cone Peak area is among the first places mentioned. Wildflowers are the first thing mentioned, but the real importance is the biodiversity of the area. Over 300 species of flowering plants belonging to 18 distinct plant communities are found on Iron Mountain and Cone Peak.

From a biodiversity perspective, what is most remarkable is the larger area, that qualifies for designation as a roadless area. (Qualifies but is not designated as a roadless area.) Crescent and Echo Mountains, Echo Basin under the rim of Echo Mountain, as well as North Peak and South Peak are comparably diverse, though not as well known. Together these all lie along what can be called Echo Ridge. From the various summits, one can see from Mount Jefferson to Diamond Peak. This roadless area contains the headwaters of the North, Middle and South Santiam Rivers.

A good trail system that links most of the unit's distinct habitats makes exploring the area easy and enjoyable. Deep, dark forest stands, alpine meadows, rock spires, cliffs and bare volcanic rock contribute to the landscape's diversity.

The area's varied microclimates (dry to wet and warm to cold — all in close proximity), soil types and elevations provide diverse habitats for numerous plant and animal species. The highlands were spared glacial scouring and/or inundation during the last ice age, which contributes to the remarkable geography. Over 60 species found here are unusual or rare for the western Cascade Mountains, even including one species of sagebrush (*Artemisia ludoviciana*).

On a mere quarter section (160 acres) on Echo Mountain Ridge, one can find 80 percent of all the Oregon conifer species found at that elevation throughout the state. The sixteen species of conifers that have been identified in the roadless area are:

- Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
- mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*);
- Pacific silver fir (*Abies amabilis*)
- grand fir (*Abies grandis*);
- white fir (*Abies concolor*);
- subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*);
- noble fir (*Abies procera*);
- Alaska yellow cedar (*Callitropsis nootkatensis*);
- dwarf or common juniper (*Juniperus communis*);
- Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*);
- western white pine (*Pinus pinales*);
- ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*);
- lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*);
- western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*); and
- western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*).

There are, in fact, seventeen conifer species, if one counts the grand fir-white fir hybrid (some do, some don't). Surprisingly, sugar pine is not found here, although it is found nearby. This may be because this area is located near the northern edge of the sugar pine's range, or perhaps there just wasn't room for it in this little quarter-mile square.

This is the Iron Mountain-Cone Peak *Uninventoried* Roadless Area listed in *Oregon Wild* because, as the name suggests, the Forest Service has never officially acknowledged the roadless character of the 8,808 acres. It should qualify, because it is over 5,000 acres in size and it is uncontroversially roadless.

Currently this area has no official protections. Iron Mountain is well known and loved, so the Forest Service might not want to log the area, but that may not last under the current administration. Especially because the more formal administrative protections afforded by the Roadless Area Rule is under attack. This is the subject of the next section of this Dispatch.



White sagebrush (*Artemisia ludoviciana*).

Source: Br. Alfred Brousseau, College of St. Mary, California (via Forest Service webpage).

(Adapted from the book *Oregon Wild: Endangered Forest Wilderness* by Andy Kerr (Timber Press 2004.)

## Roadless Area Rule Threatened

As we mentioned in the article about the Iron Mountain-Cone Peak area, the Trump Administration has announced that they are repealing the Roadless Area Rule. As is the case with much of what the Trump Administration says, there is more involved than the short original announcement suggests. The Roadless Area Rule protects 58.5 million acres, including some parts of the proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument. It can only be amended through a specific process.

The announcement came from the US Department of Agriculture, which includes the Forest Service. USDA claimed that repealing the rule will improve forest management for better wildfire prevention, remove limitations on road construction and reconstruction and help economic development in rural areas.

This is specious reasoning. Studies of Western forests have found that “forest management” in any form increases the frequency of fires. Statistics show that the vast majority of fires start within a few hundred feet of roads, so building roads, no matter what the reason, will increase the number of fires in the forests. Fires are a natural part of the forests. The devastation of fires that everyone is concerned about occur when fires hit structures, which are nowhere near roadless areas.

The Forest Service is expected to start the formal process of rescinding the Roadless Rule before the end of August by filing a Notice of Intent (NOI) followed by a 14 day comment period. It is likely that this comment period will be part of the scoping process which is the first opportunity to raise issues and alternatives that should be considered during the rulemaking process. The Forest Service has been known to miss their own timelines in the past so this is certainly not guaranteed but we need to be ready. It is also likely that there will be a second, slightly longer, comment period on the Proposed Rule in 2026.

This is the way that rules are supposed to be changed under current law. It is always possible that the Trump administration will break these rules. They just did this with the proposal to eliminate the National Environmental Impact Act (NEPA).

When the actual Notice of Intent is issued, we will send out an Alert, as quickly as we can, asking you to send in comments. We will include a short set of comments aimed at the problems with the Notice of Intent. The number of adverse comments should help the resistance and provide ammunition for the law suits that will follow.

Milo Mecham, President  
Friends of Douglas-Fir National Monument

1. Bradley, C. M., C. T. Hanson, and D. A. DellaSala. 2016. Does increased forest protection correspond to higher fire severity in frequent-fire forests of the western United States? *Ecosphere* 7(10):e01492. 10.1002/ecs2.1492 <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ecs2.1492> This study lists many other, similar studies.
2. Wilderness Society Study, <https://ctmirror.org/index.php?gf-download=2025%2F07%2FSummary-NFS-roads-fire-paper-2025.pdf&form-id=1&field-id=11&hash=25a3a33883a1769b6afe0faa767c5382e52a832ee5b12b8f07a4697dd3b9e776>