

New U.S. forest rules blocked

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A federal judge put the brakes on the Bush administration's plans to loosen rules governing the U.S. National Forest system.

District Judge Phyllis Hamilton ruled in San Francisco that the U.S. Forest Service had not conducted environmental impact reviews or taken public comment on the changes as required by law.

The Forest Service had no immediate comment on Friday's ruling, but the Los Angeles Times said the ruling was considered a big win for environmentalists.

"I think it's a tremendous decision that vindicates the public's right to participate in national forest management," said Earthjustice lawyer Tim Preso.

Earthjustice was among the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which challenged a 2005 order by the Forest Service that the Times said invalidated forestry rules established during the Reagan and Clinton administrations.

The Forest Service had made the changes to streamline the paperwork process governing the 192-million-acre system; however green groups alleged the changes stripped away key protections for endangered wildlife.

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