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## **Colorado outfitters: Keep roadless lands intact**

Dozens of hunting and fishing guides send letter to state roadless task force

DENVER—Colorado’s hunting and fishing outfitters are asking the state’s Roadless Areas Review Task Force to recommend complete protection of the Centennial State’s remaining roadless backcountry, citing the importance of this land when it comes to their ability to make a living.

“There’s a very clear connection between roadless lands in Colorado and healthy fish and game habitat,” said Mike Murphy, owner of T Bar M Outfitters in Durango. “These lands are the reason we still have viable elk and deer herds, and that hunters of all types have the chance to pursue them on public lands. Roadless lands are the reason we still have wild and native trout in Colorado. Without roadless lands, many of us in the outfitting and guiding business would be forced to do something else.”

In total, 130 outfitters from all over the state signed the letter to the task force, which specifically asks the task force to “keep Colorado’s inventoried roadless areas free of new or reconstructed system roads, and to hold the line on OHV access expansion.” The letter also asks the task force to give outfitters, hunters and anglers the same consideration given to industry on public lands.

“As businessmen and women who buy permits to operate on public lands, we have a vested financial interest in those lands and feel strongly that we deserve the same considerations granted to timber, mineral, grazing and other public lands operators,” the letter reads.

“That’s what multiple-use public lands are all about,” Murphy said. “It’s important that task force members realize that multiple use applies to hunters and anglers and the people who lead them into the backcountry, just as much as it applies to oil and gas operations, off-road vehicles and timber companies.”

Colorado has over 4 million acres of inventoried roadless backcountry, which is completely accessible through a variety of means—access is dictated by the 11 national forest plans in the state.

“I think we’d just like to keep it like it is,” Murphy said. “Everybody has a piece of the pie now. Let’s keep it that way.”

The letter was delivered to the task force on Thursday.