

PRESS RELEASE

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Coloradans overwhelmingly ask Roadless Areas Review Task Force to protect National Forests

Newest comments demonstrate support is as strong as ever

Denver – Coloradans strongly support continued protection of the state's National Forest lands, based on an overwhelming majority of the comments submitted to date to the Colorado Roadless Areas Review Task Force. The Task Force, which was appointed by the Governor and state legislature, is charged with recommending whether several million of Colorado's backcountry forest lands will continue to be managed for multiple use recreation and wildlife habitat conservation or whether they will be developed for commercial timber and energy production.

Of the 491 comments submitted to the Task Force that specifically make roadless area management recommendations, more than 80% favor continued roadless area protection. Top reasons cited for wanting to keep Colorado's backcountry forests as they are include damage of new road construction to habitat, wildlife, and watersheds and enjoyment of natural places to recreate. These recent comments echo the more than 96,000 comments submitted over the past five years by Coloradans supporting roadless area protection.

The findings were released today in anticipation of the Task Force's first deliberative meeting by Colorado's Forest Legacy, an ad hoc coalition of conservation, recreation, and wildlife groups working to protect roadless areas from commercial exploitation. The comment summaries were compiled by Mondo Business Group, Ltd., a Denver-based consulting firm.

“This comment summary is strong evidence that the Task Force should weigh carefully any decisions to change current roadless area management,” said Adriana Raudzens, a representative of Colorado's Forest Legacy. “Coloradans clearly don't want their forests to be further developed for commercial uses.”

Roadless areas are some of Colorado's most cherished backcountry recreation areas. They serve as critical habitat for big game and other wildlife, and act as headwaters for many municipal watersheds. Coloradans enjoy hunting, backcountry skiing, hiking, biking, and fishing in these areas.

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The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which was established in 2001 to protect these areas from new road construction and commercial timber cutting, was the most popular rule-making in American history. The rule was rescinded in 2005 by the Bush administration and has been replaced with a state by state petition process.

For more information about Colorado's roadless areas review process or to learn about the breadth of diverse values contained in Colorado's roadless forests, visit www.roadless.net. Copies of the summary prepared by Mondo Business Group, Ltd. will be available online and in hardcopy at the Task Force's deliberative meeting today.

Colorado Background:

Governor Bill Owens and the Colorado Legislature have appointed a bipartisan task force to make a recommendation to Governor Owens as to whether or not the state of Colorado should petition for any changes different from the 2001 Roadless Rule. The legislation which created the task force set the 2001 Roadless Rule as the base from which any decisions should be made.

Coloradans have submitted over 96,000 public comments in favor of protecting Colorado's 4.4 million acres of roadless forests and the 2001 Roadless Rule.

From Trout Unlimited's: "Where the Wild Lands Are"

According to a recently released report by Trout Unlimited entitled "Where the Wild Lands Are," all three of Colorado's native cutthroat trout species depend heavily on roadless areas for habitat and survival. For instance, 76 percent of present-day greenback cutthroat trout habitat flows through roadless areas. Also, the bulk of Rio Grande and Colorado River cutthroat habitat is in waters flowing through roadless areas (58 percent and 71 percent respectively).

Roadless areas are equally important to big game and Colorado big-game hunters, the report notes. For example, 41 percent of all land in the state that yields the highest number of trophy mule deer bucks is roadless.

Colorado's Forest Legacy is an ad hoc coalition consisting of the Colorado Mountain Club, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, National Wildlife Federation, Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project, Colorado Environmental Coalition, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Wilderness Workshop, Western Colorado Congress, and Environment Colorado. See www.roadless.net for more information.

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