

Executive Summary

Analysis of the Public Comments Submitted to the Colorado Roadless Areas Review Task Force between September 2005 and June 30, 2006

Background. Colorado's Forest Legacy hired Mondo Business Group, Ltd., a Denver-based consulting company, to compile a summary of the public comments submitted to the Colorado Roadless Areas Review Task Force between September 2005 and June 30, 2006. To date, there have been public meetings held by the Task Force in Delta, Durango, Pueblo, Denver, Fort Collins, Steamboat Springs, Monte Vista, Glenwood Springs, and Grand Junction where both oral and written comments were collected. In addition, the public has submitted written comments via email, mail, or a web form to the Task Force. Commenters can provide input generally on the issue, or provide a specific comment about a National Forest or Roadless Area.

This report was generated from all of the written comments submitted to the Task Force via the Colorado Department of Natural Resources between September 2005 and June 30, 2006. This report does not reflect the comments submitted either orally or in writing by invited testifiers at the public meetings. In addition, the report includes a separate summary of mass submissions of identical text such as postcards, petitions, or form letters submitted in one package, although these comments are not included in the specific geographic, topical, or forest-specific analyses.

The Colorado Roadless Areas Review Task Force was created by the Colorado Assembly in Senate Bill 243 in 2005. The legislature directed the Task Force to hold a minimum of eight public meetings, one in each National Forest and one in Denver, as well as to accept and consider written public comments in order to develop recommendations on the management of National Forest roadless areas for the Governor's consideration in the fall of 2006.

Analysis of written public comments. From data gathered, 4,904 people took the time to submit written comments, either at a public meeting or through the web, email, or postal mail, addressing the roadless issue and particular areas of the National Forest they felt warranted comment. There were 4,412 specific comments, which are broken down in the full report into a number of categories, including county, city, gender, specific roadless area, specific National Forest, and topic. Not all of the comments made specific recommendations for or against roadless area protection.

General public. Three thousand three hundred and twenty one (91 percent) commenters specifically called for continued protection of roadless areas, while 345 (9 percent) commenters indicated that they generally were against the continuation of the roadless area protections. This average percentage breakdown is generally consistent across the seven Colorado National Forests (see Figure A) and across Colorado's counties. Crowley County, which only received one comment, is the only county without a majority of support for roadless area protection. In fact, 79% of the 53 counties with citizens that commented show popular support for roadless area protection at 75% or greater (see Figure B).

Figure A. Summary of public comments specific to Colorado’s National Forests generated between September 2005 and June 30, 2006.

National Forest	Comments supporting future roadless area protection		Comments generally opposing future roadless area protection	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF	172	98%	4	2%
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison NF	352	98%	98	2%
Manti-La Sal NF	30	73%	11	27%
Pike-San Isabel NF	131	98%	35	2%
Rio Grande NF	10	91%	1	9%
Routt NF	262	91%	25	9%
San Juan NF	220	94%	13	6%
White River NF	104	96%	4	4%

Governments and organizations. In addition to citizen comments, local governments engaged in the roadless conversation. Recognizing that our records of local government actions may be incomplete (local governments did not consistently submit written notice of their actions to the Task Force), our analysis revealed that over 80% of the governments that chose to speak since September 2005 on the roadless issue generally were in support of roadless area protection.

Of the 62 organizations that submitted opinions (again, our records may be slightly incomplete given the inconsistency of submittal methods), around 80% supported roadless area protection. A handful did not offer support or opposition but stated that they wanted decisions to be made locally. The supportive comments were offered, for the most part, by a variety of conservation, recreation, outdoor industry, and sportsmen’s organizations. Notable submittals were from an ad hoc coalition of 131 outfitters who strongly urged roadless protection, as well as from the Statewide Sportsmen’s Advisory Group and the Colorado Sportsmen United for Public Lands Protection.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife submitted detailed comments on each roadless area along with a summary letter (dated May 18, 2006) to the Task Force stating “Colorado's Inventoried Roadless Areas should be protected, managed and maintained to provide the maximum benefit for wildlife and wildlife habitat.... Maintaining the provisions of the 2001 Roadless Conservation Rule would allow us to conserve the values and characteristics of roadless areas that are critical to the Division's mission, and which provide multiple public benefits, without prohibiting such uses as grazing, mineral exploration and extraction, forest health and fire management.... [R]epealing the protections currently afforded these lands could result in irreversible changes.”

Figure B. Summary of all Colorado public comments generated between September 2005 and June 30, 2006 broken out by the home county of the commenter, and support for or against continued roadless area (RA) protection.

County	Total Comments	Comments Generally Supporting RA Protection	Comments Generally Against RA Protection	Percentage of commenters generally supporting RA Protection
Adams County	45	42	3	93%
Alamosa County	7	7	0	100%
Archelta County	3	2	1	67%
Arapahoe County	145	140	5	97%
Archuleta County	11	11	0	100%
Boulder County	518	513	5	99%
Broomfield County	20	16	4	80%
Chafee County	13	13	0	100%
Clear Creek County	2	2	0	100%
Conejos County	1	1	0	100%
Costilla County	3	3	0	100%
Crowley County	1	0	1	0%
Custer County	5	5	0	100%
Dolores County	3	2	1	67%
Delta County	145	98	47	68%
Denver County	240	233	7	97%
Douglas County	28	25	3	89%
Eagle County	79	79	0	100%
El Paso County	434	414	20	95%
Elbert County	2	2	0	100%
Fremont County	7	5	2	71%
Garfield County	77	74	3	96%
Gilpin County	1	1	0	100%
Grand County	6	5	1	83%
Gunnison County	16	16	0	100%
Hinsdale County	1	1	0	100%
Huerfano County	2	2	0	100%
Jackson County	12	6	6	50%
Jefferson County	254	196	58	77%
La Plata County	223	207	16	93%
Lake County	6	6	0	100%
Larimer County	222	217	5	98%
Las Animas County	1	1	0	100%
Lincoln County	1	1	0	100%
Logan County	1	1	0	100%
Mesa County	215	141	74	66%
Mineral County	4	4	0	100%
Moffat County	12	10	2	83%
Montezuma County	74	53	21	72%
Morgan County	2	2	0	100%
Ouray County	14	14	0	100%

Park County	1	1	0	100%
Pitkin County	166	166	0	100%
Prowers County	2	1	1	50%
Pueblo County	41	32	9	78%
Rio Blanco County	1	1	0	100%
Rio Grande County	11	8	3	73%
Routt County	242	223	19	92%
Saguache County	4	4	0	100%
San Miguel County	55	55	0	100%
San Juan County	2	2	0	100%
Summit County	54	54	0	100%
Teller County	9	6	3	67%
Weld County	32	29	3	91%

Comments by topic. In addition to a geographic analysis of the public comment, the report includes an analysis of the public comment by topic. In the report body, these general statements are broken down by National Forest.

A. Energy

- **24 comments: We need more roads for energy development.** Energy development has been part of Colorado for a long time. We should allow this use to continue to heat our homes. Coal mining is an important clean energy source and provides many jobs, contributing to local economies. Underground coal reserves should be excluded from roadless designations.
- **108 comments: There are enough roads already for resource extraction.** Energy exploration in roadless areas should stop. Apply protective designations that secure roadless areas from the extractive industries. Remove some of the older existing roads left over from past resource extraction. Old logging roads are being taken over by motorized vehicles and are causing erosion. Roadless areas are a precious commodity and should not be squandered in the last “days” of our quest for oil.

B. Wildlife/Habitat

- **8 comments: We need more roads to access wildlife.** Barring hunters from accessing back roads would hurt many local economies.
- **315 comments: We do not need more roads to access wildlife.**
- **350 comments: We already have adequate numbers of roads and we fear more roads will harm wildlife and disrupt habitat.** Road construction and motorized vehicles disrupt hunting, resulting in negative impacts to biodiversity and the preservation of ecosystem and species. We need more space as lands continue to be developed.
- **16 comments: We do not have an adequate numbers of roads.**

C. Water

- **0 Comments: We need more roads to develop water resources.**

- **327 comments:** *We have adequate numbers of roads; roads harm water resources and quality.* Water supplies may be harmed by air pollutants, sediments in stream channels from mining, logging, and erosion from motorized vehicles, and pollution from oil and gas operations. It is important to protect watersheds.

D. Economic values

- **17 comments:** *We need more roads to create economic opportunity and jobs.* Mining in Colorado has had a positive impact on local and state economies.
- **188 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; roadless areas create economic opportunity.* Economic impacts result from people not visiting Colorado because it is developed. People come to see beautiful landscapes and not oil and gas operations. Businesses depend on the natural assets and the unique outdoor experiences of natural landscapes.
- **69 comments:** *The Forest Service can't manage roads they have already.* The Forest Service already has a roads maintenance backlog exceeding \$8 billion. This is a huge fiscal and legal liability as well as a burden to the taxpayers. If we cannot maintain existing roads, it does not make sense to create new roads.

E. Quality of Life

- **11 comments:** *We need more roads to enhance local quality of life.*
- **262 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; roadless areas enhance quality of life.*
- **197 comments:** *People visit Colorado to enjoy the solitude and pristine lands, and to get away from noise and traffic of the cities.*
- **113 comments:** *Roadless areas keep the air quality high.*

F. Motorized Recreation

- **49 comments:** *We need more roads to create recreation opportunity.* Creating more off-road vehicle access would provide more opportunities to enjoy public lands, especially for the elderly, handicapped, and poor (who cannot afford outfitter guides, organized hunting). Roadless areas should be managed by the local forest. Keep access to the forest for multiple uses including: ATV, motorcycle, 4x4, snowmobile, and other off-road vehicles.
- **94 comments:** *Motorized vehicle enthusiasts help maintain trails in cooperation with the Forest Service; do not close more roads.*
- **248 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; roadless areas create recreation opportunity.* The elimination of the Roadless Rule could jeopardize a trail infrastructure that has taken years to develop and maintain.
- **169 comments:** *Do not allow motorized recreation in roadless areas.* There has been a large increase in motorized vehicle use, including motorcycles, dirt bikes, ATVs, and ORVs, which degrade and harm backcountry experiences, especially hunting experiences. There needs to be more enforcement of ATV/ORV vehicles. Trash and abuse of lands are a problem.

G. Grazing

- **0 comments:** *We need more roads for cattle ranchers to operate.*
- **15 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; roads harm grazing.*

H. Commercial Timber

- **7 comments:** *We need more roads to promote commercial timber industry.* We should consider more logging to create a healthier forest. Some commenters discussed specific areas that are at risk of wildfire.
- **47 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; commercial harvesting harms the landscape.*

I. Wildfire

- **10 comments:** *We need more roads to reduce risk of wildfire.* Road construction on the Front Range should be for fire roads only. We are not opposed to temporary roads to facilitate essential restoration treatments for clearing fire hazards and/or search and rescue operations.
- **26 comments:** *Adequate roads exist; more roads increase risk of fire.*

J. Environment/Natural Landscape

- **13 comments:** *We need more roads - perhaps roadless areas create de facto wilderness?*
- **348 comments:** *Adequate roads exist. Keep roadless areas in natural state.* Damage to roadless areas will be irreversible. We need to preserve these areas for future generations.
- **535 comments:** *Preserve the environment; concerned about human impact on Colorado's natural landscapes.*