

Summary of Public Comment
on the
Colorado Roadless Area Task Force Draft Recommendations
Submitted August 2006
Summarized by the Colorado Forest Legacy

The public submitted comments over the course of approximately two weeks in response to the draft recommendations developed by the Colorado Roadless Areas Review Task Force. People submitted comments via a web form set up by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and via hard copy to the DNR. Below, we provide a summary of all the comments, a quantitative and qualitative description of the web comments, and a description of the hard copy comments (all that we know about). We have also provided a handful of excerpts from the web comments that we felt were representative of common sentiments expressed by those submitting comments via the web.

Summary of All Responses

- 3020 comments were submitted.
- 98% expressed support for strong roadless area protections, with many asking that the draft recommendations be strengthened. Less than 1% expressly opposed protection.
- 82% of the commenters expressed support for the Task Force's recommendation to disallow road building for the development of future oil and gas leases. Less than 1% supported fewer restrictions on oil and gas development.
- 88% of the commenters expressly asked for the removal or narrowing of the coal exemption, which they felt was overly broad and deleterious to the forest resources. Less than 1% supported fewer restrictions on coal mining.
- 86% of the commenters specifically requested that the Task Force recommend that the Governor ask for interim protection for roadless lands. Nearly all the remaining commenters did not address the issue.
- 25% specifically asked that the timber and roading exceptions be narrowed such that fire mitigation efforts are focused at the interface with communities and not in the backcountry. Less than 1% supported fewer restrictions. The remainder did not specifically address the issue.

Web Form Quantitative Results

- Citizens submitted 688 comments via the web form.
- 91% (625) expressed support for strong roadless area protections, with many asking that the draft recommendations be strengthened. 2% (16) opposed protecting roadless areas, and the remaining 7% did not state a clear preference.
- 23% (157) of the commenters expressed support for the Task Force's recommendation to disallow road building for the development of future oil and gas leases. 1% supported fewer restrictions. The remainder did not address the point.
- 46% (315) of the commenters expressly asked for the removal or narrowing of the coal exemption, which they felt was overly broad and deleterious to the forest resources. Many suggested that the coal industry could be adequately accommodated through a temporary road exception instead of a broad exemption. Only 1% of the commenters expressly opposed narrowing or eliminating the coal exemption.

- 41% of the commenters (282) specifically requested that the Task Force recommend that the Governor ask for interim protection for roadless lands. Nearly all the remaining commenters did not address the issue.
- 29% (199) specifically asked that the timber and roading exceptions be narrowed such that fire mitigation efforts are focused at the interface with communities and not in the backcountry. Less than 1% supported fewer restrictions.
- 6% (40) specifically expressed strong opposition to exempting ski areas from roadless protections. Nearly all the remaining commenters did not address the issue.

Web Form Qualitative Results

The following sentiments were expressed by a significant number of commenters:

- It is important to maintain natural areas and resources for future generations. Coloradoans feel a strong responsibility not to pollute or destroy the state's forest landscapes, thereby burdening future generations.
- Colorado's natural environment is the reason why many people live here.
- Colorado should become a leader in developing/implementing alternative energy, and should not be encouraging fossil fuel development in roadless lands. Allowing fossil fuel development in roadless areas will not significantly address our pressing energy needs.
- While commenters appreciated and acknowledged the hard work of the Task Force, they urged the Task Force to reduce the number and breadth of road-building and timber cutting exceptions.
- Long-term economic health is best achieved by protecting our national forests instead of by encouraging short-term industrial activity.
- Coloradoans do not trust the oil and gas industry, expressing skepticism that the industry complies with environmental laws and blaming the industry for saddling the next generations with pollution problems.
- Population growth is a leading reason for protecting roadless areas. Coloradoans strongly perceive that they are fast losing natural places to development of various types including motorized recreation and energy.
- Roadless areas help protect municipal drinking water.

Hard Copy Comments Submitted to the Department of Natural Resources

- 372 people sent a letter through the Colorado Action Network applauding the Task Force for restricting road building associated with future oil and gas leases, objecting to the broad exemption for coal operations, and asking that the Task Force request the Governor to seek interim protection for Colorado's roadless forests. 43 of these letters were individually customized.
- 1154 people signed on to a common letter applauding the Task Force for restricting road building associated with future oil and gas leases, objecting to the broad exemption for coal operations, and asking that the Task Force request the Governor to seek interim protection for Colorado's roadless forests.
- 254 people signed on to a common letter objecting to the broad exemption for coal operations, asking that the timber cutting and associated road building exceptions are appropriately narrow, and asking that the Task Force request the Governor to seek interim protection for Colorado's roadless forests.
- 546 people sent a letter to The Wilderness Society for submittal to the Task Force applauding the Task Force for restricting road building associated with future oil and gas leases,

objecting to the broad exemption for coal operations, asking that the timber cutting and associated road building exceptions are appropriately narrow, and asking that the Task Force request the Governor to seek interim protection for Colorado's roadless forests. 47 of these letters were individually customized.

- The Colorado Wildlife Federation submitted a letter commenting on the coal section. They objected to the absence of a list of roadless areas subject to the exemption, emphasized the wildlife value in all of the potential coal areas in the North Fork Valley, and urged strongly that the coal mining areas remain subject to the roadless rule, allowing use of temporary roads when necessary for coal operations. They also stressed the importance of confining application of the "coal" provision to coal rather than to include minerals generally.
- The Colorado Timber Association submitted a letter that asks that the timber cutting and associated road building sections be broadened to allow less restricted timber cutting (e.g., not confined to areas near communities). They also express support for the ski area and mining exemptions. They express concern that the draft rule will prevent protecting forests from wildlife and insect outbreaks.
- Gunnison Energy, Arch Coal, and Oxbow Mining submitted comments both in hard copy and via the web form. Their comments are accounted for in the statistics above. The letters ask that the remediation and reclamation wording in the coal section be changed to refer to the definitions set forth in the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. They also list the seven areas that they would like exempted from the rule's applicability.
- Colorado Forest Legacy, a coalition of a number of conservation and recreation organizations, submitted detailed comments, emphasizing the need to strengthen the recommendations so that Colorado's roadless forests can receive the strongest protection possible while still accommodating current and necessary temporary uses.

Excerpts from Web Comments Representative of Common Views

"Do not allow the coal exception to provide loopholes for more damaging activities."

"Opening-up roadless areas to development is a short-sighted answer to our energy problems."

"It is time to find a balance between these industries and leaving some of Colorado untouched. Instead of drilling for oil and gas, we need to begin conservation measures to reduce our dependency on these fossil fuels."

"I think we need active logging and mining in this state, but there are already roads set in place for these activities. I would like to see the task force implement stronger guidelines so gas companies and logging companies can not request new roads into these already roadless areas."

"Direct harvest and energy uses into areas where the investment in road construction has occurred, and away from roadless areas."

"I've worked in the Oil & Gas industry for 25 years and there are no petroleum reserves hidden away in our roadless areas that can even begin to solve America's energy problems."

"As a public lands user, avid OHV enthusiast, and son of an exploration geologist, I understand intimately the trade-offs we make when protecting roadless areas and lands with wilderness characteristics. I am one of the users who will be denied their desired activity in these areas. However, I think that it is more important to preserve these lands unspoiled for future generations, wherever they are left, than it is to accommodate some users who already have the vast majority of federal and state lands open for their use."

“Your current recommendation keeps the door open for building roads and thinning/logging in the backcountry, which nobody wants, which the federal agencies can't afford, and for which there is no scientific basis.”

“Since I live in a wildfire "red zone", I'm cognizant of the need for fire mitigation and understand that this may mean temporary roadbuilding in some areas adjacent to at-risk communities. However, allowing roadbuilding in the backcountry under the guise of fire mitigation is ridiculous.”

“After all the good work that's been accomplished by the task force, it would be tragic if special interests were allowed to make an end run around the will of this state's citizens and invade these last remaining intact forests before Colorado's rule is finalized.”

“Listen to the public.”

“Whatever you can do to conserve what Colorado has for the future rather than exploiting it for the present will be appreciated by generations to come.”