



PRESS RELEASE

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Support for Colorado's backcountry intensifies

New study shows 86% of written comments favor roadless forests

DENVER - Support for protecting Colorado's backcountry continues to grow, with concerns for wildlife topping the list, according to the latest summary of public comments submitted to the state's Roadless Areas Review Task Force. In just two months, the number of written comments has nearly doubled, with the vast majority personal statements. In fact, of the 781 written comments that make a case for or against continued protection of Colorado's roadless National Forest land, 86% call for protecting these special backcountry places.

"This most recent look at our National Forest Roadless Areas echoes the many previous public processes, in that a large majority of Coloradans unequivocally want to protect our National Forests," said Vera Smith with the Colorado Mountain Club. She added, "Wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities are simply too important for Colorado to lose."

According to the new summary of public comments, the top reasons cited for continuing roadless area protection include preservation of wildlife habitat (230) and preservation of natural landscapes (219). In fact, 170 commenters specifically argued that building more roads into the backcountry would harm the state's unique wildlife populations by, for example, disrupting migration activity and corridors, fragmenting habitat, introducing noxious weeds, and eventually forcing big game off public lands.

Smith's is one of several recreation, wildlife, and conservation groups that make up Colorado's Forest Legacy, an ad hoc coalition that commissioned the Mondo Business Group, Ltd. to complete an independent survey of comments sent to the Roadless Areas Review Task Force. Colorado's Forest Legacy is also planning to hand-deliver another 15,000 public comments to the Task Force at its next deliberative meeting, Friday, April 14th.

The Task Force, which was created by the Governor and state legislature, is reviewing public opinion of Colorado's National Forest roadless areas in an effort to make recommendations about the future management of these lands. Up until May of last year, these forests were protected under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Now, the fates

of some of Colorado's most popular backcountry destinations and undeveloped wildlife habitat are up in the air.

While the Task Force is required to consider public comment according to state law, what weight they'll give local citizen input is still uncertain. With five public hearings concluded and at least four more to go, the Task Force is just now beginning to develop a decision-making process.

Adriana Raudzens with the Sierra Club in Colorado hopes that the Task Force's decision will be an easy one. "If you consider the public comment to date, there is unprecedented support for keeping roadless lands as they are. Opening these forests to road building, commercial logging, and oil and gas drilling would be just about the most unpopular thing the Task Force could do."

The comment summary also recorded several other values attributed by many to the state's spectacular out-of-doors. In total, 201 commenters described roadless areas as enhancing quality of life. One hundred seventy-five of the written comments highlighted the recreation opportunities created through the conservation of backcountry landscapes; and 126 written comments focused on the harmful impacts of road building on Colorado's scarce water resources.

In contrast, several topics of interest to the Task Force received little debate by the public. Only twelve commenters mentioned grazing in roadless areas, and all supported keeping these areas protected. Similarly, only twenty-two commenters mentioned wildfire, with 2/3 arguing that adequate roads exist for fuels treatment.

For more information about the public comment summary or Colorado's Forest Legacy, please visit www.roadless.net.

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