



Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act Question/Answer Fact Sheet

What is the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act and why do we need it? Montana's Rocky Mountain Front is one of the last best places to hunt, fish, camp, and watch wildlife, but changes are coming to Montana faster than people can keep up with them. We've heard from many people that they like the Front the way it is—and we agree. That's why the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front came together to protect continued access to renowned hunting and fishing, healthy landscapes full of wildlife, and a Montana way of life. We believe the best way to protect traditional values, to fight a growing noxious weed problem, and to guarantee that public land remains open for stock use, wood cutting, hunting, and hiking is through Montana-made legislation.

What makes the Heritage Act unique? For over a century, the Rocky Mountain Front has brought people from all walks of life together for one common cause – ensuring the Front remains as it is. In that spirit, this proposal represents a home-grown solution for the Rocky Mountain Front, having been put together by the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front, a group of local landowners, ranchers, residents, Blackfeet Tribal members, conservationists and hunters/anglers. The coalition believes our future is brightest when we work together to find solutions for land management along the Rocky Mountain Front.

Are there foreseeable impacts the Heritage Act will have on local economies? This proposal has been developed by locals who live along the Front and who have made sure the proposal doesn't infringe on traditional uses such as grazing, hunting, outfitting, and firewood gathering. We believe that in the long run everyone who uses the Front and cherishes its natural values will benefit from this proposal. Protecting the wildlife and scenic values of the Front will help boost the local economy by attracting tourism, hunting and fishing dollars. In addition, provisions to help control noxious weeds will increase the land's productivity for livestock operators and reduce the costs to ranchers, counties, and taxpayers.

What specifically would the Front Heritage Act do? All of the public lands along the Front managed by the Forest Service and the BLM would be included in our proposal. There are three main parts of the proposal:

1. *Conservation Management Area (CMA)*: The majority of public land falls into this category. The CMA protects public land for traditional uses—non-motorized travel in sensitive wildlife areas and rugged terrain most suitable to foot and stock travel while allowing reasonable access for motorized use to trailheads and some backcountry travel. Grazing, use of chainsaws, firewood gathering and other such activities would not change.
2. *Noxious Weed Control*: Help control, eradicate and prevent noxious weeds on private, state, and federal lands.
3. *Wilderness*: Designate Wilderness for some Forest Service lands.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT AREA

What is the Conservation Management Area and has this approach

been tried before? The Front is a unique place and protecting it requires unique solutions. Our idea is to designate the vast majority of public lands as a Conservation Management Area. While special designations such as National Recreation Areas have been done before, to our knowledge, this is the first time that a coalition has put together a customized designation for such a large area of public land. Here's what the Conservation Management Area does:

--**Access**: We started with the 2007 Travel Plan, the current law of the land and an extremely popular Forest Service decision developed over many years of public participation. By using this planning document as the basis for travel management decisions we protect access to our public lands as it exists now for hikers, stock users, mountain bikers, and motorized users. The Forest Service could close trails (due to damage, user conflict, etc.) following public input--unless an emergency administrative closure is warranted. The Forest Service may choose to decrease motorized use but could not increase/expand motorized use.

--**New road construction**: Could only occur to meet safety, private property or emergency needs.

--**Logging and wood cutting**: Both allowed. Prioritizing projects that fill a restoration need including reduction in fuels to better protect property and lives and to return or maintain the lands within a normal range of ecological variability. Personal fire wood cutting would continue.

--**Other uses**: There are no other restrictions proposed within the Conservation Management Area.

Why is a Conservation Management Area needed? The 2007 Travel Plan is a good Forest Service commitment but will only be in place for 10 or 15 years. However, after that a future Forest Service supervisor or Washington, D.C. political appointee could make changes that would hurt the integrity of the land or limit local uses. For example, maybe a future Forest Supervisor will think it is a great idea to open new routes at the expense of stock travel and hiking. Reasonable side-boards on the Forest Service and the BLM will protect access for future generations of hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bike users in the same areas the forest plan allows today.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

Are noxious weeds really a problem on the Front? The Fish and Wildlife Service has identified noxious weeds as one of the top three threats to the ecological integrity of the Rocky Mountain Front. In particular, noxious weeds represent the largest threat by wildlife habitat fragmentation and loss of productive big game habitat. Noxious weeds are also very harmful to Montana's economy. Statewide it has been estimated that noxious weeds cost Montana more than \$42 million dollars a year.

What would the Heritage Act do to help control noxious weeds?

Our proposal would: Direct the Forest Service and BLM to prioritize noxious weed control on federal land and develop a comprehensive weed management plan (with citizen input). And within one year, the Forest Service will provide a comprehensive report to Congress assessing the scope of noxious weeds and identify additional resources necessary to eradicate noxious weeds within the Management Area and prevent their spread. In addition, the Coalition will continue to work with grassroots leaders, counties, and our Congressional delegation to secure additional money to assist counties in the fight on weeds.

WILDERNESS

Why more Wilderness? The Heritage Act includes common sense Wilderness designation for the best and most deserving lands. These proposed additions to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas would follow topographic features and take into consideration how the public lands are currently being used.

What does Wilderness accomplish that the Conservation Management Area designation cannot?

The Wilderness Act provides an even greater level of certainty for the wildest lands of the Front; a 45-year legislative track record, both as a tool for Forest Service management and legislative action. The Forest Service knows what is expected of them when managing Wilderness and we believe that some of the Front deserves the iron-clad assurance that its unique character will remain for generations to come.

Why not just make the whole Front a Conservation Management Area?

We see the Wilderness and the Conservation Management Area designation as complementary but not necessarily interchangeable. For example, chainsaws and mountain bikes are allowable in the Conservation Management Area but generally not in Wilderness. Livestock grazing is a recognized legitimate use in Wilderness and also allowed in the CMA as are hunting and fishing, traveling with stock and commercial outfitting. Wildfire suppression can and does occur in existing wilderness on the Front and our legislation would ensure that protection of private property and lives from wildfire would be of utmost importance to the Forest Service and the BLM (we have more detailed info available for both grazing and wildfire in Wilderness).

How have you decided where Wilderness should be designated along the Front?

For years we've been trying to figure out the best mixture of Conservation

Management Area and Wilderness. We've been talking to land owners, permittees, outfitters, and other local people to identify the current uses and determine how our proposal would affect people. We're still talking and listening.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Will there be public meetings or open houses for this proposal and will I have a voice in the process? Yes, the Coalition plans to hold public presentations on a DRAFT proposal during fall of 2009 in several communities along the Front as well in cities around the state. We want there to be plenty of opportunities to share opinions; ours is a citizens' proposal and we're trying our level best to be open and honest and make sure that people know what we're hoping to accomplish. We welcome all input and ideas.

How can I get more information and receive regular updates?

If you want to receive updates and information call Jennifer at 406-544-5987 or e-mail: info@savethefront.org. Our website www.savethefront.org allows you to provide feedback on the proposal, become a Citizen Supporter, and find out other ways to help make this vision a reality.