

Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front

Montana's Newspapers Agree: *Protect the Rocky Mountain Front. Now.*

The Rocky Mountain Front's jaw-dropping beauty unifies Montanans with its natural qualities that help define Montana as the "last best place." A consensus for conservation is reflected in the many eloquent editorials published in Montana's major newspapers, celebrating the Front's scenic and wildlife values and denouncing proposals to compromise those values. Allowing drill rigs, roads and pipelines into these cherished mountains makes about as much sense as breaking up the furniture to heat your home, the *Missoulian* suggested. Every major Montana newspaper has editorialized in favor of protecting the Front, some repeatedly. This doesn't count many op-ed pieces by columnists and guest writers. The 22 editorials published since 2001 highlight the economic value of the Front's wild and scenic character, the need for permanent solutions and the wisdom of retiring leases among other protective measures.¹

***Missoulian*, May 5, 2004: "Montanans must defend Front anew"**

Generations of Montanans have protected the remarkable stretch of wild and wildlife-rich country spilling out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness and onto the prairies. We have our predecessor's foresight and sense of stewardship to thank for this wildland legacy we inherited. Now it is our generation's turn. More precisely, it's still our turn. Our previous successes in safeguarding the Front from imprudent development have been only temporary. Yet another push is under way to sacrifice areas along the Front for speculative drilling for natural gas. Once again, Montanans need to rise up and shout a collective 'No!'

***Billings Gazette*, Oct. 7, 2004: "Decision saves the Front – for now"**

We are pleased that the Bush administration has recognized public concern and acted to preserve the Front - at least for now. The Interior Department decision gives Montana's congressional delegation and the Front's many defenders time to work for a permanent plan. We call on Baucus, Burns and Rehberg to work together to ensure that the Front remains a last, best place.

***Great Falls Tribune*, June 21, 2004: "Congress should allow lease swapping, selling"**

The owners of such leases deserve an opportunity to sell or swap them—and spare themselves and taxpayers the misery of protracted appeals. Congress should approve the Baucus plan to at least study the potential for lease swaps and buyouts. Unless that happens, taxpayers will keep shelling out the buck for more decision, studies and lawsuits. And developers will cool their heels, perhaps for decades.

¹ For more information or photocopies of full editorials, see www.savethefront.org, or contact:
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Daily Inter Lake, Dec. 16, 2003: “Drilling the Front would be affront”

The long-term economic value of an untainted resource like the front, with its drawing power among hunters and anglers alone, will arguably outstrip the short-term benefit of gas extraction.

Great Falls Tribune, Oct. 14, 2004: “BLM action on Front drilling a welcome step”

Others — ourselves included — believe the future economic value of what might be found *under* those mountains and reefs won't come close to the present and future value of keeping them intact and undeveloped. The present value revolves around the region's large and growing recreation and tourism industries, compared with a mere handful of potential energy jobs. ...Forestalling development, meanwhile, opens the door to a couple of other possibilities: buying or trading out the existing energy leases along the Front, and developing alternative energy technologies.

Helena Independent Record, May 16, 2004: “Leave the Front as it is”

Drilling makes little sense. Opening the Front to the mess that has so severely damaged its sister overthrust belt region in Canada would be a travesty.... To argue that drilling in the Front would contribute materially to this country's energy sufficiency is laughable — a benefit infinitesimally small compared to the potential damage to one of our nation's greatest treasures.

Missoulian, Aug. 9, 2001: “We can't drill our way to security”

Maintaining good international relations, securing trade agreements and strengthening economic ties abroad will do far more to bolster America's energy security than any number of holes drilled along the Rocky Mountain Front or in the arctic tundra.

Bozeman Daily Chronicle, March 20, 2002: “Don't drill on Montana's cherished public lands”

Eighty-five percent of U.S. Forest Service land and 94 percent of Bureau of Land Management land in Montana already is open to energy exploration. Does it really make sense to open up the [Rocky Mountain] Front, as well?...Clearly, our dependence on other countries for energy is a problem that requires our most serious thought. Allowing unfettered exploration and development, however, is a short-sighted solution.

Daily Inter Lake, Oct. 7, 2004: “The Front is too precious to drill”

The country has a responsibility to develop a sound energy policy that includes new domestic sources of oil and gas, but it also has an obligation to protect other natural resources at the same time. In the view of many Montanans, the Rocky Mountain Front is a natural resource that is singular and irreplaceable.

Missoulian, April 29, 2001: “No holes for Montana's soul”

If you told us Montana's Rocky Mountain Front were the last place on earth to drill for oil and natural gas, we'd start breaking up furniture to burn for fuel...Anyone who gazes at the front, even from afar, must have some notion of why so many Montanans care so deeply about it. And the closer you get, the more obvious the reasons for its preservation. It is here, where the Rocky Mountains spill out onto the prairies and amid the elk, bighorns, grizzlies and other wildlife, that you discover the soul of Montana.