

October 20, 2006

Sen. Conrad Burns  
187 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Max Baucus  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Rep. Denny Rehberg  
516 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Burns, Senator Baucus, Rep. Rehberg, and other Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations, represent thousands of Montana residents and nonresidents who hunt, fish and care about the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitat. Although our organizations and members encompass a diversity of backgrounds and interests, all of us share a common passion for hunting and fishing, conservation, and a love of Montana's Rocky Mountain Front – a national treasure known worldwide for its diversity of wildlife and its nearly unmatched conservation history. We are writing to endorse pending legislation within the Fiscal Year 2007 Interior Appropriations Bill, introduced by Sen. Conrad Burns, to withdraw federal lands from future gas and oil leasing within the Rocky Mountain Front with the understanding that in times of emergency Congress can rescind the withdrawal.

Combined with recent actions by two energy companies, Startech and Questar, to sell and relinquish their leases along the Front, Sen. Burn's legislation will help to permanently protect the Rocky Mountain Front from speculative natural gas exploration. This nonpartisan, homegrown solution continues a 100-year tradition of conservation on the Front, protects public access and ranching traditions, enjoys the support of a solid majority of Montanans and helps maintain this stunning landscape for future generations to enjoy. Government studies show there is little energy potential along the Front. By putting the drilling controversy to rest local communities can confidently move forward with plans to enhance their agricultural economies by taking advantage of the public's proven desire to recreate in protected landscapes.

President Bush's Administration terminated an environmental review of a natural gas exploration project in October 2004, citing public opposition to drilling the Front and its importance to the hunting community. Federal officials then encouraged Montanans to seek creative agreements with leaseholders to put an end to the controversy. In the summer of 2006 the hard work of local citizens, including hunters and anglers, paid off when deals were struck with Questar and Startech to relinquish their leases. To secure assurance from the government that these federal leases won't go back on the auction

block at some later date, Sen. Burns' legislation would make permanent current government policy to not issue any new oil and gas leases on the Front's federal land.

The Rocky Mountain Front has rightfully been called America's Serengeti. It's a place where the Rockies leap from the plains, and as the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks points out, it remains in the top one percent of habitat for fish and wildlife in Montana. By our thinking, that translates to the top percent of habitat in the lower 48. The Front harbors one of the largest herds of bighorn sheep in the country. Its streams are filled with some of the purest strains of westslope cutthroat trout in the State. Some of the finest mule deer hunting in the country is found on the Front. The Front provides critical elk winter habitat, and abundant elk hunting opportunities. One-quarter of Montana resident households hunt, and nearly half fish. The Front's fish and wildlife resources contribute to the fact that fish and wildlife related expenditures in Montana contribute well over one billion dollars in economic impact in the State.

All of us support responsible energy development of our public lands. These lands play an important role in local economic development and help to fuel the nation. However, just as the Bush administration stated in October 2004, there are some places that should not be developed in order to protect wildlife. We respectfully submit, based on our own personal experience, that the Rocky Mountain Front is one of these places.

We urge you and your colleagues in Congress to help pass Sen. Burns' proposed legislation and help us, and other citizens, achieve permanent protection of the Rocky Mountain Front.

Sincerely,

The undersigned hunting, angling and conservation organizations:

Anaconda Sportsmen's Club  
Big Sky Upland Bird  
Billings Rod and Gun Club  
Bitterroot Houndsmen Association  
Flathead Wildlife  
Gallatin Wildlife Association  
Great Falls Archery Club  
Helena Hunters and Anglers  
Hellgate Hunters and Anglers  
Laurel Rod and Gun Club  
Libby Rod and Gun Club  
Medicine River Canoe Club  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Montana Trout Unlimited  
Orion, The Hunter's Institute  
Public Lands Access Association  
Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife  
(cont. on next page)

Red Lodge Rod and Gun Club  
Russell Country Sportsmen  
Skyline Sportsmen Association  
Bitter Root Chapter of Trout Unlimited (not misspelled, that is their  
official spelling)  
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
Flathead Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
Joe Brooks Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
Kootenai Valley Trout Club  
Madison-Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
Magic City Fly Fishers  
Pat Barnes-Missouri River Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
West Slope Chapter of Trout Unlimited

CC:

All members of the U.S. Congress