

Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front

Strong Support for Protecting Montana's Rocky Mountain Front

July 12, 2006

Montanans, local officials, the Blackfeet Tribe, federal agency staff, and Montana's major newspapers are applauding legislation introduced by Senator Conrad Burns that would prevent any new oil and gas leases from being offered on federal land along the Front. While existing leases would not be affected, should those leases expire or be traded, donated or purchased then that area would be off limits to future re-leasing. Already, one firm, Questar, has agreed to donate its Front leases and other companies soon are expected to donate or sell their Front leases.

Retiring the leases – along with federal legislation to protect the Front – will allow Montanans to keep the Rocky Mountain Front the way it is now; open and accessible for everyone to enjoy, while protecting the Front's exceptional wildlife, recreation, and existing businesses. Montanans are proud of our century long tradition of protecting the Front and the Coalition is working to help pass on the area's natural resources for future generations.

Below is a brief summary of what Montana newspapers, citizens, local officials, and statewide polling shows about the Front legislation. For more information, see: www.savethefront.org

Montana's Senators

"It's clear this is a critical area for habitat, recreation, agriculture, and just to appreciate the majesty of Montana. This language will prevent any new leases from being approved and help protect the area even further. I've heard from groups across the spectrum, agriculturalists, conservationists, recreation folks, tribal leaders, community officials, not to mention the everyday Montanans who are concerned about this area. I think this strikes a common-sense balance that benefits all parties involved." --**Sen. Conrad Burns** press release, June 27, 2006

"Max welcomes Sen. Burns to the fight to protect the Front and thinks this bill is a small step in the right direction." --Barrett Kaiser, spokesman for **Sen. Max Baucus**, *Great Falls Tribune*, June 28, 2006

Montana Newspaper Editorial Excerpts

***Missoulian*: "Front protection gains ground," July 9, 2006**

"Barring future leases is a useful step - not just in securing long-term protection for the area but also in better addressing America's energy needs....The exploratory wells that have been drilled have been dry holes. There are many other places in the United States considered to offer much higher potential for gas and oil - places that generally are far less environmentally fragile than the Front."

***Billings Gazette*: "Burns' support fortifies efforts to save Front," July 7, 2006**

"In some places, energy development and environmental protections can coexist. The Front isn't one of those places. Just as building roads to place oil rigs in Glacier Park would degrade a landscape that is intrinsically and economically valuable in its undeveloped state, so would development in the Front, which is valued for the diversity of wildlife and high quality of hunting, fishing and hiking."

Bozeman Chronicle: “Burns’ ban on drilling is the right thing to do,” July 4, 2006

“But, in the end, Burns should get credit for his action. He did the right thing. The Rocky Mountain Front deserves protection from mines and oil wells no matter what Burns and others think of regional, national or world energy policies.”

Great Falls Tribune: “Legislation, donation keys to securing Front,” July 2, 2006

“We’ve long believed that preserving the pristine Front is desirable, and not just because it’s a spectacularly beautiful place and home to an astonishing range of flora and fauna. Because of tourism and recreation, the place’s economic value in its present, relatively undeveloped condition far exceeds the economic value of developing its oil or gas resources. Thanks to Burns’ legislation and the cooperative work of the Front’s defenders and Questar, the goal of preserving our region’s crown is two steps closer.”

Helena Independent Record: “Good news for the Front,” June 29, 2006

“Four years ago, Burns supported oil and gas leasing on the Front, calling it in the national interest. But now he says he’s listened to groups ‘across the spectrum’ that oppose drilling on the Front and believes his legislation ‘strikes a commonsense balance that benefits all parties involved.’

Burns said it is clear that the Front “is a critical area for habitat, recreation, agriculture, and just to appreciate the majesty of Montana.” It’s hard to disagree with that.”

What the Public, Blackfeet Tribe, and Industry Are Saying

Thanks to Sen. Burns for bringing us a little closer to permanent protection. And thanks to Sen. Max Baucus for his tireless efforts to fend off the countless threats to this unrivaled Montana landscape. Now Rep. Denny Rehberg needs to help ensure Burn's efforts are not wasted. Be sure, hunters are watching.” --**Chris Marchion**, Anaconda, president of the Montana Wildlife Federation, letter to the *Billings Gazette*, July 5, 2006.

“It’s a tremendous thing. I have three grandsons, and they will be able to saddle up their horses in the morning and ride along the Front just like I do. Some of these areas have to be preserved for our grandchildren and their grandchildren. They have the right to see the way this was created, and this will ensure there will be a Rocky Mountain Front forever.”

--**Karl Rappold**, Dupuyer rancher, *Helena Independent Record*, June 28, 2006

“The Tribal Business Council urges our congressional delegation to secure this agreement and legislation for permanent mineral withdrawal for all public lands along the Rocky Mountain Front.” --**Blackfeet Tribal Business Council** open letter, May 11, 2006

"We're pleased to accommodate Trout Unlimited's request for an assignment of this acreage, which is not located near any of Questar E&P's active exploration and production areas.”

--Questar E&P Executive Vice President **Jay B. Neese**, *Great Falls Tribune*, June 29, 2006

“We are working with the [Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front] to see if we can come to some sort of solution, which would result in a similar type of agreement with the leases being pulled from circulation.” --**Kel Johnston**, CEO Alberta Clipper Energy, *Great Falls Tribune*, June 29, 2006

What Officials Are Saying

“It is commendable to see industry and conservation groups like Questar and TU engaging in open dialogue and demonstrating innovation and leadership by working cooperatively to conserve natural resources. Senator Burns has shown great leadership in promoting a free-market approach to protecting the Rocky Mountain Front.” --**Mark Rey**, the undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, quoted by the Associated Press, June 29, 2006

“We need to be looking at a multitude of small things that will build a diversified economy for Teton County and for the city of Choteau. It's easy to look at the big 700-pound gorilla, but if you look at the economies of other communities around the west that are successful and growing, it's not from large, single-source generators, it's from a multiple of small things. I think we have resources that are appealing to small enterprises if we invest and stimulate that ourselves.”

--Choteau mayor **Dan Clark**, *Choteau Acantha*, July 5, 2006

“That was the premise two years ago, that suspending the Blackleaf EIS would buy some time to come up with something to create this kind of win-win situation...Overall, this is good news.”

--**Don Smurthwaite**, BLM spokesman, *Helena Independent Record*, June 28, 2006

Protecting Front Enjoys Continuing Strong Statewide Support

A statewide Montana poll conducted for the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front by a well-known Republican polling firm in late April shows strong support for retiring or donating energy leases on public lands along the Front. A significant majority of Montana voters – 60 percent – support efforts to work with energy companies to donate or sell energy leases along the Front. The same percentage of Montanans, 60 percent, also strongly supports efforts by Congress to prohibit drilling on public lands along the Front.

By nearly a two-to-one margin, Montana voters say they would be more likely to vote for their U.S. Senator if he supported the current policy of no drilling on public lands along the Front, rather than less likely to vote for him (54 percent more likely to 32 percent less likely). In fact, 28 percent are intense in their support, saying they would be *much* more likely to support their Senator knowing about this particular vote.

Montanans consistently have expressed their desire to protect the Front, (93 percent and higher of public comments) in support of efforts to oppose drilling along the Front (Fall 2004) and to support traditional recreation and travel along the Front (Fall 2005).

In 2004, a statewide Lee Newspaper poll showed that by more than 2-to-1 Montanans supported protecting the Front by swapping out the energy leases there in exchange for leases in less sensitive areas, and a 1998 statewide poll for the Great Falls *Tribune* also showed that, by 2-to-1, Montanans opposed any energy development of the Front.

The Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front is an organization of ranchers, hunters, anglers, outfitters, guides, local business owners, public officials, conservationists, and other Montanans who are working to protect the Front.