

## **Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Montanans Urge Forest Service to Protect Rocky Mountain Front, Support Travel Plan Emphasizing Traditional Horse and Foot Travel**

*More Than 37,000 Public Comments Flood Forest Service,  
With 98 Percent Supporting Alternative Three*

Choteau, MT-- Montanans and Americans across the country overwhelmingly are urging the United States Forest Service to protect the Rocky Mountain Front and adopt a Travel Plan that best protects the wildlife and traditional horse and foot recreation on the Front.

This past summer the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked for public comment on five draft alternatives for a future Travel Plan for the Rocky Mountain Front portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest covering roughly 390,000 acres.

An analysis conducted by the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front showed that, of the 37,220 comments received, a resounding 97.95 percent supported Alternative Three, which would allow Montanans to continue using the existing 150-mile road network to provide access to the Front. Looking at just Montanans, an overwhelming majority, 75.7 percent, urged the Forest Service to adopt Alternative Three. The Coalition 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.

Alternative Three balances wildlife habitat needs with recreational opportunities and access. Under Alternative Three, for example, twenty-three percent of non-Wilderness National Forest public land on the Front would remain within one mile of an open motorized route -- particularly in the Teton and Sun River drainages -- while the proposal would allow continued motorized travel on the existing 88-miles of road, including to most dispersed campsites.

“It doesn’t surprise me that Montanans and Americans once again are urging protection for the Rocky Mountain Front,” said Jim Brogger, an Augusta ranch owner, retired veterinarian and a founding member of the Backcountry Horsemen since its inception. “Montanans have a long tradition of working together to protect the Front for its wildlife, excellent recreation, and the working landscape it provides for many Montana families. Hopefully the Forest Service will listen to Montanans and work with us to protect this special place.”

When completed, the revised Travel Plan will guide management roads and trails on the Front for the next two decades, specifying routes for hikers and horseback riders, snowmobiles and off-road vehicles (ORVs).

Montanans repeatedly have urged the Forest Service to support traditional recreation on the Front. During the 2002 “scoping period” for the new travel plan, a clear majority, 90 percent of Montanans who commented, wrote to the Forest Service advocating for the agency to develop a conservation-based plan.

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In addition to citizen comments, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) also strongly supports Alternative Three. MFWP's comments to the Forest Service noted that Alternative Three would best protect wildlife, preserve the area's watershed, and represents the will of the people.

Great Falls resident Pat McGuffin who frequently rides horses on the Front said the results send a clear message to the Forest Service. "The overwhelming response, more than 97 percent, in favor of Alternative Three from Montanans and others from around the nation provides the Forest Service with an amazing opportunity to exercise its own guiding principles and mission: '... to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations,'" McGuffin noted. "This mandate from Montana's and America's citizens for Alternative Three supporting traditional foot and horse travel on the Rocky Mountain Front also allows the Forest Service to fulfill its motto, 'Caring for the Land and Serving People.'"

Other citizen comment periods also have resulted in strong public support for upholding the heritage of the Front. Last year more than 49,000 Americans contacted the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) about proposed drilling along the Front with over 93 percent of Montanans and 99 percent of all Americans urging the agency to not proceed with any new drilling.

Just over one year ago the Bush Administration, citing public comments and the wildlife values of the Front, halted work on any new drilling along the Front for the foreseeable future.

Montanans who contacted the Forest Service about the Travel Plan often were quite passionate about the Front's value: "I own and use both 4X4 pickups and ATVs, but believe that their use in the Front is not consistent with good land management principles because of the resource damage potential they pose. The limited Law Enforcement capability of the U.S. Forest Service cannot guarantee compliance of 'some' use...A total non-motorized use strategy will make enforcement more practical with limited numbers of officers," said Dick Mangan, from Missoula who is President of the 2004-05 International Association of Wildland Fire.

Montanans have worked for many generations to preserve the wildlife and quiet grandeur of the Front, and it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of Montanans support maintaining and protecting the Rocky Mountain Front. Previous support for the Front includes:

- Newspapers across the state, including in Great Falls, Bozeman, Helena, Kalispel and Missoula, have editorialized in support of preserving the Rocky Mountain Front.
- In 2004, a statewide poll question conducted as part of a 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.
- A 1998 statewide poll for the Great Falls Tribune also showed that, by 2-to-1, Montanans opposed any energy development of the Front.
- In 1997 the Forest Service received more than 2000 public comments, of which 80 percent supported the agency's subsequent decision to prohibit oil and gas leasing on the Front for up to 15 years.
- In 1997 the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council passed a resolution opposing any energy development in the Badger-Two Medicine portion of the Front.

"The numbers show that local people want to limit motorized travel along the Front -- to our credit, the rest of the Nation agrees," said Tony Bynum, from East Glacier, who is an environmental scientist, avid hunter and member of the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council. "It seems that of late, there have been many occasions when people mostly agree, however, the difference this time is that it's also the right thing to do!"

The Forest Service provided files of all public responses used for this analysis. The Montana Wildlife Federation and the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front then hired a Missoula-based contractor – a former U.S. Forest Service employee with an extensive background in public comment analysis – to conduct this study.

Attachment: (2) Sample of Public Comments and Analysis with Tables

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### *Excerpts from Front Travel Plan Comments, Summer 2005*

*I own and use both 4X4 pickups and ATVs, but believe that their use in the Front is not consistent with good land management principles because of the resource damage potential they pose. The limited Law Enforcement capability of the U.S. Forest Service cannot guarantee compliance of "some" use...A total non-motorized use strategy will make enforcement more practical with limited numbers of officers.*

**--Dick Mangan, Missoula**

President, 2004-05 International Association of Wildland Fire

*Alternative 3, by your analysis and our analysis, best serves the area's wildlife resources. ... This Alternative appears to be the "will of the people." ... With Alternative 3, all wildlife values will be enhanced. In the long-term, hunters and anglers will be better served. There will be 477 miles of trails available for non-motorized recreation and 88 miles of roads and trails available for motorized recreation. Fourteen trailheads will be available for hunter access.*

**Mike Aderhold**

Regional supervisor, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks

*Badger-Two Medicine is special with multiple ecosystems as well as having Blackfeet traditional sites. Increased motorized travel would degrade these areas.*

**--Richard Odegaard, Browning**

*We can attest to how motorcycle owners have flagrantly left permissible trails to ride game trails in Mortimer Gulch. After a few trips on game trails, subsequent riders can't tell which are allowed trails and which are prohibited.*

**--Max Barker, Augusta**

JJJ Wilderness Ranch

*We are hunters and fishermen and we have spent many days hunting in Blackleaf, the Blindhorse drainage and Ear Mountain management area and fishing the Sun, Dearborn and Teton rivers. It bears repeating that these are remarkably beautiful places which are remarkable also for the unique balance of wildlife still found here. Quiet solitude is an endangered experience in today's world. We support Alternative 3 as the best hope for preserving a place where the sounds of nature can still be enjoyed.*

**Judy Cornell, Choteau**

*There is so little quiet left in our crowded country. We all need the peace and quiet of nature....Please help preserve it for us and for future generations.*

**--Judy Singer, Choteau**

*For the last century and long before, outdoorsmen have been content with walking or riding horses and mules into these lands.... Non-motorized use also provides for a real hunting experience, but this can be ruined by herds of ATVs interfering with a real experience, not to say what it does for the populations of wildlife.*

**Arlo Skari, Chester farmer**

*We have an opportunity to preserve a unique and special place which was used by our ancestors, not only for preservation of life but also for the preservation of spirit ... I have listened to stories told by my uncle of tree burial sites and vision quest places in the Heart Butte area. The area all along the Front, from St. Peters Mission to Chief Mountain, still holds religious and cultural significance for both the Little Shell and Blackfeet Tribes.*

**Larry Salois, Cut Bank, Little Shell tribal member of the Chippewa Cree**

*In the decades we have been coming up to this canyon, we have noticed an increase in ORV use every summer. Of course, my biggest complaint is the noise. Most people come to quiet outdoor areas for the quiet. While one can go hiking or fishing and not affect one's neighbor, ORV use affects everyone.*

**--Augusta resident**

*If you open up the Front to even more motorized activity, you're defeating your whole purpose for managing the area.*

**Augusta business owner**

*Cities (and even villages such as Augusta) are full of motorized noise; it is worth keeping some areas free of it, and this is such a place. We humans can choose to live in cities and can adapt to them, but the animals can't. There are fewer and fewer areas for them, and the interface area of coexistence is becoming narrower. ORV intrusion would tip that fragile balance. Unlike traditional horse and foot use, ORVs are so intrusive and destructive that they preclude other use and enjoyment of the area.*

**--Augusta resident**

*Off-road motorized use can create conflicts with wildlife, private landowners, hikers, horseback riders and the fragile landscape. ... Alternative 3 of the proposed Forest Service Travel Plan, promotes traditional uses of this landscape, such as foot and horse travel, while allowing motorized travel on main access roads to trailheads. Alternative 3 is the most visionary alternative for keeping the Rocky Mountain Front a treasure for future generations.*

**Mary Fay, Great Falls**

Aug. 19, 2005 letter to the editor, *Great Falls Tribune*

*I would like to see the Forest Service have a strong enforcement arm and the incentive to catch the idiots who are creating new "roads" and trails. I would do this by greatly increasing the fines to say \$1000 per incident and letting the Forest Service keep the money for the purposes of enforcement.*

**East Glacier resident**

**--END--**

# QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS PUBLIC COMMENTS CONCERNING A TRAVEL PLAN FOR THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT

October 12, 2005

The Lewis and Clark National Forest provided one CD of electronic letters and two boxes of hardcopy letters. These items contained 3,283 unique comments, and 33,937 form letters for a total of 37,220 submissions.

Of the total submissions, 277, or 0.74%, supported Alternative 1; 34, or 0.1%, supported Alternative 2; 36,457, or 97.95% supported Alternative 3; 5, or less than 0.1%, supported Alternative 4; and 16, or less than 0.1%, supported Alternative 5.

A total of 2,199 comments were submitted by Montanans, of which 261, or 11.9%, supported Alternative 1; 26, or 1.2%, supported Alternative 2; 1664, or 75.7%, supported Alternative 3; 4, or 0.18%, supported Alternative 4; and 9, or 0.41%, supported Alternative 5.

Of the 3,283 unique comments submitted, 146, or 4.4% supported Alternative 1; 34, or 1.0%, supported Alternative 2; 2702, or 82.3%, supported Alternative 3; 5, or 0.15%, supported Alternative 4; and 16, or 0.49%, supported Alternative 5.

Overall, of the 37,220 total submissions, 3,283, or 8.8%, were unique letters. Of the 2,199 Montanan submissions, 1846, or 84.0%, were unique letters. Also, of the 37,220 total submissions, 98.7% of comments supported reduced motorized recreation, while 1.3% supported motorized use at the same or at an increased level. Of the 2,199 Montanan submissions, 81.0% supported reduced motorized recreation, while 19.0% supported motorized use at the same or at an increased level.

## TABLES

### Total Comments Submitted, By Alternative

Total Comments Submitted	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Multiple Alts
37220	277	34	36457	5	16	21
Percentage	0.74%	>0.1%	97.95%	>0.1%	>0.1%	>0.1%

Total MT Comments Submitted	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Multiple Alts
2199	261	26	1664	4	9	19
Percentage	11.9%	1.2%	75.7%	0.18%	0.41%	0.87%

**Note:** As comments on alternatives were not 100% of the submissions, adding the percentages together will not equal 100%.

## Total Unique Letters Submitted, By Alternative

<b>Total Comments Submitted Unique Letters</b>	<b>Alt 1</b>	<b>Alt 2</b>	<b>Alt 3</b>	<b>Alt 4</b>	<b>Alt 5</b>	<b>Multiple Alts</b>
3283	146	34	2702	5	16	21
<b>Percentage</b>	4.4%	1.0%	82.3%	0.15%	0.49%	0.64%

<b>Total MT Comments Submitted Unique Letters</b>	<b>Alt 1</b>	<b>Alt 2</b>	<b>Alt 3</b>	<b>Alt 4</b>	<b>Alt 5</b>	<b>Multiple Alts</b>
1846	132	26	1479	4	9	19
<b>Percentage</b>	7.2%	1.4%	80.1%	0.22%	0.49%	1.0%

**Note:** As comments on alternatives were not 100% of the submissions, adding the percentages together will not equal 100%.