

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Montanans Overwhelmingly Support Protecting the Rocky Mountain Front**

*Detailed Analysis of Comments to Lewis and Clark National Forest Travel Plan Show More Than 90% of Respondents Reject Proposed Travel Plan, Favor Traditional Non-Motorized Use*

Choteau, MT- In a tremendous outpouring of response, Montanans and Americans nation-wide overwhelmingly urged the Lewis and Clark National Forest to scrap the proposed Rocky Mountain Front Travel Plan and adopt a new plan that favors traditional use, such as walking, hiking, and horseback riding.

In 2002, the Lewis and Clark National Forest developed a proposed travel plan which will determine if and where off-road vehicle use will be allowed in the Rocky Mountain Front. *The proposed plan permits motorized travel by dirt bikes, off-road vehicles (ORVs), and snowmobiles in two-thirds of the Front.*

**Last winter, the Forest Service requested public comment on the proposed plan. The public enthusiastically responded: over 7600 comments were received, the largest public response ever received by the Lewis and Clark National Forest. A convincing majority, over 90% of Montanans and over 98% of respondent's nation-wide, criticized the proposal and urged the Forest Service to develop a new conservation-based plan. Less than 2% of the respondents supported ORV use on the Rocky Mountain Front, suggesting no significant popular support for the Forest Service proposal.**

"The fragile nature of the Rocky Mountain Front is so eggshell thin, that attempting to accommodate motorized recreational uses over the majority of this land will destroy the quiet and the solitude that so many people today are seeking," said Chuck Blixrud, a Rocky Mountain Front outfitter.

The public cited a variety of concerns in opposing ORV use on the Front. These concerns include:

- A broadly-held appreciation that the Rocky Mountain Front is a unique and beautiful wild landscape that should be protected from damage and development.
- A desire to preserve essential wildlife habitat in the Rocky Mountain Front.
- The need to maintain quiet, meditative places for future generations.
- The importance of safeguarding culturally-significant lands in the Front.
- An appreciation of the damage to landscape and wildlife habitat that ORVs create.
- The impracticality of rehabilitating the Front once ORV damage occurs.
- Fears that destructive commercial oil and gas development would follow the development of recreational roads in the Rocky Mountain Front.

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Responses strongly favored hiking and horse travel on the Front, where generations of horseback riders, hunters, hikers, outfitters, Native Americans, elk and bear, local residents and visitors alike, have shared the trails on this unique landscape, enjoying centuries-old quiet and traditional experiences. With ORV sales in the United States tripling over the past decade, and advanced technology increasing their speed and power, these traditional uses are increasingly threatened. Loud noise and exhaust which displace walkers and horseback riders, inadvertent introduction of noxious weeds, and illegal trails which fragment premier wildlife habitat and hunting areas, are just some of the serious problems that come with ORV use on the Front.

“You should know that I had a snowmobile, and still have an ATV and a Harley, and I love to ride them all,” writes J.L. Ashmore of Seely Lake, Montana. “That doesn't mean that riders, like me, have the need or the right to ride everywhere. One of the places we don't need to be riding is the Rocky Mountain Front.”

It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of responses supported maintaining the Rocky Mountain Front as a roadless wilderness. For years Montanans have worked to preserve the wildlife and quiet grandeur of the Front:

- Newspapers across the state, including in Great Falls, Bozeman, Helena and Missoula, have editorialized in support of preserving the Rocky Mountain Front.
- In 1998 a state-wide Great Falls Tribune poll found that, by a 2-to-1 margin, Montanans oppose any energy development of the Front.
- In 1997 the Forest Service received more than 2000 public comments, of which 80% 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 Rocky Mountain Front is in the top 1% of wildlife habitat and wildlands in the continental United States. In large part that's because the Front remains free of motorized travel," said Roy Jacobs, taxidermist and Choteau resident. "I would hate to see it turned into a motocross track. ORVs can be as devastating there as oil and gas development."

The Forest Service provided files of all public responses for analysis. Montana Wilderness Association volunteers working with the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front spent over 250 hours reviewing and recording the responses.

See attachments for additional public responses regarding the Travel Plan.

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**Public Comments on the Proposed  
Rocky Mountain Front Travel Plan**  
November 19, 2003

(Attachment to Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front press release)

As the parent of a ten year old person with disabilities who is wheelchair-bound, I know that I could insist upon her right to visit the unique world of the Front by motorized conveyance, surely the only way she could ever experience this unique feature of our nation's geography. But I won't. I know that to do so would, by its means of locomotion via rubber tires and internal combustion engine, contribute to the advancing degradation of one of the few less spoiled regions of our country and our continent.

*Daniel Biehl, Great Falls*

If this travel plan is accepted, before we know it the Rocky Mountain Front will look like many of my "old" favorite areas in the Little Belts. They are over-run with trails across meadows, wildflowers are few, eroded hillsides, covered with noxious weeds and too noisy to enjoy an afternoon by a small meandering stream.

*Grayce Holzheimer, Choteau*

Allowing ORV use off the roads gives the ORV people unequal access to the back country, and through wildlife disruption and noise spoils the enjoyment of the area for others.

*Donald R. Holtz, Great Falls Native*

As a retired Forest Service employee, I know that the agency is not capable of enforcing these routes to ensure motorized users do not double the area of use.

*John Gibson, Billings*

The Front is of particular interest to me because my grandfather homesteaded there in 1895. His heart would break if he could see it today. Once wild lands are lost to motorize travel, they are lost forever. Please don't do this to Montana.

*Karen Booker, Helena*

Moses, while on a vision quest to the mountains, was instructed by God to remove his sandals, for he was standing on Holy Ground. The Badger-Two Medicine/Rocky Mountain Front is recognized by my Blackfeet people as some of our Creator's most sacred work. Now . . . , if sandals are disallowed on sacred ground, then clearly any plans for ORVs, bulldozers, oil rigs, or gas pipelines should be abandoned. (From a Guest Editorial in the Billings Gazette.)

*Jack Gladstone  
Blackfeet Tribal Member  
East Glacier Park, MT*

The Rocky Mountain Front has a wild and unspoiled land character that is a sustainable monetary asset to Montana people. It is a revered place where traditional uses of hiking, hunting, fishing packing, photography, wildlife viewing, camping, etc., can be experienced in an inspiring atmosphere.

*Resident of Radersburg, MT*

Once you experience the quiet of standing still and breathing, really breathing nature, I find it inconceivable you would, on a spiritual level, even imagine letting a snowmobile race through your sanctuary, a dirt bike rip through your prayers.

*Sherry Lee, Missoula*

I am now 78 years of age and can only walk short distances. My disability in no way excuses me from doing whatever I can to preserve what we have left of more-or-less unspoiled natural country.

*John S. Anderson, Helena*

My father died last July at our family home on the Gallatin. He was 101 years old. A year or so before his death, I promised him that I would do whatever I could to help preserve the Montana wilderness and wildlife that he and my mother experienced and cherished so dearly. This letter is part of that promise.

*Fred Pessl, Big Sky*

Please develop a travel plan that truly protects the most beautiful and wild area I've ever been privileged to view, photograph and hike. I've raved about the Rocky Mountain Front to my grandchildren. Today, I wonder if they will ever see true wilderness.

*Ida Mae Walters, Roscommon, MI  
Author of "From Ashes, a Deep Canyon Tale",  
set at the 7 Lazy P Ranch in Montana*

This is an irreversible decision, denying quiet access to the forest to all future generations. It is not Diverse Use of the Forest, since a motorized trail or area is simply of no further use to those of us who come to the Forest for peace and quiet.

*Kirk W. McVoy, Madison, WI*

Please remember you are making decisions about a wonderful place. We are discussing what to do with the crumbs of the original wilderness banquet. Development devoured the entire banquet. We can afford to leave the crumbs for our grand children.

*Richard Douglass, Butte, paraphrasing a favorite quote*