

Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front

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Montanans Praise Decision to Stop Proposed Drilling Along Rocky Mountain Front

**Citing Overwhelming Public Support & Long Tradition of Protecting Front,
Montanans Call on Congress to Swap or Buy-Out Leases**

Choteau, MT – Montanans today praised the federal government’s announcement that it will stop considering proposals to drill a portion of public lands along the Rocky Mountain Front. While a halt to proposed drilling removes the immediate threat, the action alone does not protect the Front. The Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front and other Montana leaders are urging Congress to permanently protect the Front while fairly compensating leaseholders by offering a buy-out or swap for existing leases to put the issue to rest once and for all.

“I’m not surprised that the BLM has suspended the Blindhorse EIS on the Rocky Mountain Front,” said Mary Sexton, a Teton County Commissioner. “The strong public support for the Front, questionable benefit of drilling, and limited natural gas resource available along the Front all lead to this sensible step to halt the permitting process. Now the door is open for people to work together with leadership from Congress to find resolution to this contentious issue through a lease buy-out or swap that is fair to everyone.”

The Rocky Mountain Front is one of America’s most stunning landscapes. Earlier this year, however, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) started to review proposals for new drilling permits on several existing leases located on public lands in the Blackleaf area, right in the heart of the Front.

Montanans and other Americans responded overwhelmingly and 99 percent of the more than 49,000 comments received by the BLM urged the agency to protect the Front and halt the drilling proposal.

“Once again the public has made it abundantly clear that they support permanent protection of the Front. We’re please to see that the government again recognized that and responded accordingly,” said Gloria Flora, former Supervisor of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. “Like us, Senator Burns and Baucus have been concerned over the time and expense of these repeated studies that the public rejects. Now is the time to finally put this issue to rest through a legislative solution leading to permanent protection.”

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

Drilling the Front would provide few jobs and little energy. The energy corporation that proposed drilling -- Startech Energy Inc. from Alberta, Canada -- has publicly stated twice that only five to seven jobs would be created. In addition, a study released earlier this year used federal government data to demonstrate that the Blackleaf area of the Front contains less than a day's worth of economically recoverable natural gas and 15 minutes of oil for the nation. The analysis found the entire Front (federal lands) contains less than a week's worth of natural gas and 20 minutes of oil.

“This decision will help protect our tradition of ranching, farming and working along the Rocky Mountain Front,” said rancher Karl Rappold. “We have the opportunity to protect the Front – both for today and for our grandchildren. It’s important that we don’t let this moment slip away, and we’re looking to Congress for initiative, leadership and creative solutions to complete the job and protect this important part of Montana’s heritage.”

Note: Photos of the Rocky Mountain Front available, contact chris_mehl@twso.org