

# Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front

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## **Rocky Mountain Front: Forest Service Releases Draft Travel Plan**

### ***Montanans Urge Forest Service to Adopt Final Plan That Favors Traditional Uses Such as Horse and Foot Travel***

Choteau, MT – In response to last night’s release of a draft Travel Plan for Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front, a coalition of Montanans urged the Forest Service to protect the Front by upholding and supporting traditional uses such as horse and foot travel.

The Lewis and Clark National Forest has released five draft alternatives for a Travel Plan for the Rocky Mountain Front section of the Forest and will hold open houses and a general public comment period during the next 60 days. The Plan, when finalized, will guide all travel, recreation, and other uses on the Front for the next 15 years.

Dale Neal, who lives out of Fairfield and is a lifelong resident of the Rocky Mountain Front, said the Forest Service is making a strong effort to hear from the public and he hopes Montanans will speak up in favor of preserving the traditional way of life including travel on horses and mules or on foot.

“The Rocky Mountain Front has incredible wildlife and provides key habitat that is vital for hunters and outfitters,” said Neal. “Most of us who live here understand the Front’s a special place, and we want to keep it the way it is for future generations to enjoy. In large part that’s because the Front has traditionally been used by folks who ride, pack or walk into these mountains.”

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.

The Coalition urged Montanans to attend one of the upcoming public meetings, read and review the draft alternative Travel Plans, and contact the Forest Service in support of Alternative 3, which balances opportunities for hunting and packing; quiet recreation; protects private land from illegal trespass; and checks the spread of noxious weeds.

Tony Porcarelli, an antler and wood artisan west of Fairfield, thinks the Rocky Mountain Front is an exceptional place. He, like many other residents on the Front, uses an ATV for ranching work such as fencing or spraying weeds. “There are places where ATVs belong but sensitive areas like the public lands along the Rocky Mountain Front should be reserved for the more traditional methods of travel,” Porcarelli noted.

In 2003, the Forest Service conducted a public “scoping period” on a possible Travel Plan. In response, Montanans and Americans nation-wide overwhelmingly urged the Lewis and Clark National Forest to adopt a plan that favors traditional use, such as walking, hiking, and horseback riding.

An analysis done by the Coalition showed that over 7600 comments were received, the largest public response ever received by the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and more than 90 percent of Montanans urged the Forest Service to develop a new conservation-based plan while less than 2 percent of the respondents supported ORV use on the Rocky Mountain Front.

Montanans have a long tradition of living and working along the Rocky Mountain Front – and of protecting it for future use and enjoyment. Last year, the federal government halted proposals to drill a portion of public lands along the Front after 99 percent of the 49,000 Montanans and other Americans overwhelmingly urged the government to protect the Front and stop the drilling proposal. The Coalition and other Montana leaders now 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.