

Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front

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Rocky Mountain Front Travel Plan: *Coalition Encouraged that Proposal Responds to Public, Emphasizes Wildlife, Traditional Horse and Foot Travel*

Choteau, MT – The Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front, an organization of ranchers, hunters, anglers, outfitters, guides, local business owners, Tribal members, public officials, conservationists, and other Montanans today applauded the Forest Service for developing a final Travel Plan for Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front that protects wildlife while emphasizing traditional uses on the Front.

“Hunters across the country know that the Rocky Mountain Front is some of the best wildlife habitat in the west. This plan is an overall improvement for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat,” said Dale Neal, a hunter from Fairfield.

Yesterday evening, the Lewis and Clark National Forest released a final proposed Travel Plan for the lower two-thirds of the Rocky Mountain Front covering roughly 390,000 acres, excluding the Badger-Two Medicine area. The Plan, when finalized, will guide all travel, recreation, and other uses on the Front for the next two decades, specifying routes for hikers and horseback riders, snowmobiles and off-road vehicles (ORVs).

After an initial review of the proposed final plan, the Coalition believes that the Forest Service has adopted a plan which balances opportunities for hunting and packing; continues an emphasis on traditional recreation; protects private land from illegal trespass; and checks the spread of noxious weeds.

“Motorized use has its place, but the Front is the best pack & saddle country in Montana. This plan provides some good opportunities for motorized use and I think horsemen will also be happy with it,” said Kurt Dyer, a past President of the Backcountry Horsemen of America and the Backcountry Horsemen of Montana. “It appears the Forest Service has also listened to horsemen regarding trail safety,” he said, “because this plan is safer for horseback riders and bicyclists.”

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

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A 2005 analysis of public comments on proposed Front Travel Plan alternatives showed again that the great majority of Montanans favor traditional travel along the Rocky Mountain Front. That review, conducted by the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front, demonstrated that 97.95 percent supported emphasizing quiet recreation activities such as horse packing or hiking.

In addition to citizen comments, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in 2005 submitted formal comments that strongly supported a Travel Plan that would best protect wildlife, preserve the area's watershed, and represent the will of the people.

"I go to the Rocky Mountain Front to get away from the commotion, away from noise and into quiet country. This plan isn't perfect, but it's a big improvement from what've had in the past," said Larry Davis, a retired game warden from Augusta.