

STATE OF COLORADO

Bill Owens, Governor
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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*For Wildlife-
For People*

May 18, 2006

Mr. Russell George, Chairman Task Force, and Executive Director Colorado Department of Natural Resources
1313 Sherman Street, Room 718
Denver, Colorado 80203

Chairman George and Distinguished Members of the Colorado Inventoried Roadless Area Task Force:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on Inventoried Roadless Area designations in National Forests in Colorado.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (Division) has a significant interest in the outcome of this review process, both at the statewide level and at the individual Inventoried Roadless Area module level. Throughout the review process, I have directed that Division comments be presented to you in a way consistent with the federal petitioning process guidelines and requirements. To date, nearly one hundred wildlife managers and biologists have commented on over three-hundred Inventoried Roadless Areas. One consistent message has emerged, and it is timely and appropriate that I write to you now to not only reiterate, but endorse the recommendations made by my staff. Division staff, representing a range of professional expertise, has consistently recommended that Colorado's Inventoried Roadless Areas in Colorado should be protected, managed and maintained to provide the maximum benefit for wildlife and wildlife habitat. Their recommendations are consistent with the Division's mission and legislative mandate.

Details regarding wildlife values, potential impacts, and sources for scientific guidance have been provided to you through our **Petition Comments** document, and will continue to be provided as we review each module. However, it is already clear that while our staff and our constituencies represent a diversity of geographical areas and interests, we share a common understanding that wildlife habitat is essential and a belief that the protection of wildlife species at risk is crucial. Colorado's Inventoried Roadless Areas comprise over four million acres of land – much of which represents biological strongholds that provide essential habitat for fish, for game, and for hundreds of other wildlife species that make up the diversity of the state.

We are confident that managing Roadless Areas with a goal of protecting and maintaining benefits to wildlife (and wildlife habitat) will promote significant additional benefits to Colorado citizens in general and Forest visitors in particular. Maintaining the resource values of these lands can optimize ecologic health and sustain the numerous economic benefits derived from watersheds, view-sheds, wildlife and outdoor recreation, and other compatible uses made of Roadless Areas.

On the other hand, repealing the protections currently afforded these lands could result in irreversible changes. Researchers continue to add to the body of knowledge regarding the potential impacts that may result. It may be beyond our capacity to recover from consequences such as habitat fragmentation, contamination or elimination/loss; the degradation of ecosystem integrity and water quality; or, the loss of recreational opportunity. Contemplating changes that may result in irreversible losses requires us to consider the probable long-term costs and weigh them carefully against the potential short-term gain.

Because there are some resource values and uses that can be provided only by lands such as Roadless Areas, and because our decisions today can and will effect future generations, we would urge the Taskforce to consider whether it may be most efficient to maintain the basic provisions of the 2001 Roadless Conservation Rule and "clarify" the specific significant exceptions where necessary. These provisions may, in fact, continue to appropriately and sufficiently meet Colorado's needs today as well as tomorrow. Maintaining the provisions of the 2001 Roadless Conservation Rule would allow us to conserve the values and characteristics of Roadless Areas that are critical to the Division's mission, and which provide multiple public benefits, without prohibiting such uses as grazing, mineral exploration and extraction, forest health and fire management. Further, we suggest that any proposed loosening of protections require substantive and compelling arguments that clearly articulate the benefits to the people of Colorado, as well as the larger constituency of Federal lands, and that all such proposals include plans for minimizing and mitigating negative impacts to wildlife, habitat, and wildlife recreation.

The values provided by Colorado's Inventoried Roadless Areas are due, in no small part, to the protections offered by the provisions of the 2001 Roadless Conservation Rule. Repeal of these protections may result not only in undesirable consequences for wildlife, but in the loss of choice for future generations. Forward thinking conservationists have always aimed to manage our natural resources in a way that both meets our current basic needs, and also preserves opportunity for future generations.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that a 2004 poll of Coloradans indicated that most state residents feel life in Colorado is much better than in other places they might live and, more specifically, that Colorado's scenic beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities are unique. However, compared to the results of a similar survey in 1993, respondents felt declines had occurred in opportunities to view wildlife, fish and wildlife abundance, fishing opportunities, and scenic beauty. More than 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they trust the Division to do what is right for fish and wildlife management in the state. The comments of my staff, which I endorse, are consistent with the Division's mission and the public's expectations.

Thank you again, for considering these comments and those you will continue to receive from our staff and field personnel.

Sincerely,



Bruce L. McCloskey
Director

cc: Jeffrey Crawford, Chairman Colorado Wildlife Commission
Mark Konishi, Deputy Director
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