

Colorado Roadless Rule Fails to Sustain Recreational Opportunities and Their Economic Contribution to the State

By Mike Van Abel and Brady Robinson

Conserving Colorado's roadless areas supports the Colorado way of life and the state's \$10 billion annual outdoor recreation economy. Despite some needed improvements, the draft Colorado roadless rule fails to provide long-term assurances for the future of quality backcountry recreation in the Centennial State. In order to secure these recreation and economic benefits, Colorado's roadless areas must be managed at a level that is equal to or greater than the protections afforded by the national roadless rule. The state's current proposal simply does not meet this criterion.

Inventoried roadless areas play a critical role in outdoor recreation. Close-to-home backcountry landscapes support a wide range of opportunities, from mountain biking the Monarch Crest Trail and climbing at Independence Pass, to paddling the Cache la Poudre, backcountry skiing at Berthoud Pass and hiking the Colorado Trail. Responsible management of these lands would uphold both their recreational and ecological values.

These areas also should be protected for their economic value. Active outdoor recreation supports 107,000 Colorado jobs and generates \$500 million annually in state tax revenue. Simply put, many people live and work in Colorado because of the recreational opportunities.

Through Outdoor Alliance, the International Mountain Bicycling Association and Access Fund have been involved in the Colorado roadless rule-making process. Our perspective is practical rather than ideological; we focus on protecting the values on the ground. To that end, we believe Governor Ritter deserves praise for making some refinements to the current draft. Creation of an upper-tier category and improvements to the inventory are definitely a step in the right direction.

Yet overall, the proposed Colorado rule doesn't provide the same assurances for outdoor recreation as the national roadless rule. It fails to uphold and improve roadless area characteristics, such as primitive recreation opportunities. The upper-tier management category is ill defined and covers too few acres. The proposed rule appears to be a litany of exceptions and allows for aggressive timber management activities in the heart of backcountry areas – activities that could degrade recreational experiences for a long time. The draft rule should not be finalized in its present form.

The gold standard for roadless area conservation remains the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Management rules that govern Colorado's 4.2 million

acres of backcountry must meet that benchmark. We will remain involved in the process of determining the appropriate administration of these important lands and ask Governor Ritter and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to only allow “roadless rules” that maintain the pristine wild settings that offer world-class paddling, climbing, backcountry skiing, mountain biking and hiking.

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