



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Rocky Mountain Region
740 Simms St.
Golden, CO 80401
(303) 275-5350
www.fs.usda.gov/r2



News Release

Media Contact: Lawrence Lujan
(303) 815-9902
llujan@fs.fed.us

Forest Service and Colorado Department of Natural Resources Release Colorado Roadless Rule Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement

GOLDEN, Colo., November 17, 2016 – The Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources announced today the availability of the Colorado Roadless Rule Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS). The SFEIS evaluates three alternatives for reinstating the North Fork Coal Mining Area exception as written in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule. The SFEIS will be published in the Federal Register on Friday, November 18, 2016. The Record of Decision and Final Rule will be published in the Federal Register after a 30-day SFEIS review period.

The 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule is a state-specific rule that provides management direction for conserving and managing roadless areas on national forest system lands for current and future generations while allowing certain activities that are important to the citizens and economy of Colorado to continue. The Colorado Roadless Rule was finalized by the Forest Service in 2012 after seven years of collaboration with three governors and diverse stakeholders and careful consideration of hundreds-of-thousands of comments from the public. The rule:

- Conserves 4.2 million acres of pristine backcountry in Colorado's eight National Forests, nearly 400,000 more acres than the rule it replaced.
- Provides increased protection for 1.2 million acres of high-quality roadless areas. Protecting these vital natural areas are an important climate adaptation strategy as roadless areas provide critical refuges for wildlife in a warming climate and protect headwaters that provide Coloradans drinking water.
- Provides flexibility for potential expansion of ski areas on about 8,000 acres
- Provides flexibility for temporary road construction and placement of methane vents associated with underground coal mining on about 19,000 acres in the North Fork Coal Mining Area.

Three alternatives were examined in detail in the SFEIS. Alternative B was selected as the preferred alternative, which reinstates the North Fork Coal Mining Area exception as written in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule and will apply to about 19,700 acres. Furthermore, boundaries associated with the Colorado Roadless Area and the North Fork Coal Mining Area were corrected and aligned based on more accurate road inventories.

The SFEIS complements the May 2012 Rulemaking for Colorado Roadless Areas Final Environmental Impact Statement and addresses the deficiencies identified by the District Court of Colorado in *High Country Conservation Advocates v. United States Forest Service*. The coal lease modification decisions vacated by the Court will be addressed by subject matter experts in a separate environmental analysis.

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The reinstatement of the North Fork Coal Mining Area exception addresses a State-specific concern for managing roadless areas while providing opportunities for energy development and other benefits such as supporting local economies. The Colorado Roadless Rule exception would not authorize any new leases; it would simply allow for the construction of temporary roads, so the option for coal mining is not foreclosed. Any proposal for mining activity would be subject to a separate leasing and public comment process.

The SFEIS is available for review online at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/roadmain/roadless/coloradoroadlessrules>.

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