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News Release

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Forest Service and Colorado Department of Natural Resources Release Colorado Roadless Rule Record of Decision and Final Rule

GOLDEN, Colorado, Dec. 16, 2016 –The Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources announced today the release of the Colorado Roadless Rule Record of Decision and Final Rule. This action codifies an important piece of the compromise that the Forest Service, the State and Coloradans forged during the extensive process to develop the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule. The 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule protects undeveloped areas of the National Forests by prohibiting new roads and other development activities that could undermine their natural resource value. The rule conserves 4.2 million acres of pristine backcountry in Colorado's eight National Forests, nearly 400,000 more acres than the 2001 Roadless Rule it replaces. Importantly, the Colorado Rule provides significantly increased protection for 1.2 million acres of high-quality roadless acres. In return for additional protections, the Colorado Roadless Rule provides flexibility for potential expansion of ski areas on about 8,000 acres and for temporary road construction and placement of methane vents associated with underground coal mining on about 19,700 acres in the North Fork Coal Mining Area.

The Final Rule announced today reinstates the North Fork Coal Mining Area exception as written in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule, and will apply to about 19,700 acres (about 0.5% of Colorado roadless area). This addresses a State-specific interest in 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, new leases or lease modifications, would be subject to a separate environmental review and public involvement and decision-making processes. The Final Rule also corrects Colorado Roadless Area (CRA) boundaries based on more accurate inventories of forest road locations and aligns the North Fork Coal Mining Area boundaries to the CRA boundaries.

To address the findings of the District Court of Colorado in *High Country Conservation Advocates v. United States Forest Service*, the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources announced the availability of the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) in the Federal Register Nov. 18. The coal lease modification decisions vacated by the Court are being addressed by the Forest Service in a [separate environmental analysis](#).

The Record of Decision and Final Rule will be published in the Federal Register Monday, Dec. 19, and the Final Rule goes into effect on February 17, 2017. The Final Rule is available online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/roadmain/roadless/coloradoroadlessrules>.

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