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Contact:
Press Office (202) 205-1134

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Proposed Colorado Roadless Rule

WASHINGTON, April 14, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the publication and start of a 90-day comment period for the proposed Colorado Roadless Rule, developed collaboratively to address the needs of Colorado's unique and precious roadless areas.


"We are committed to the protection of roadless areas on our national forests, areas vital for conservation of water resources, wildlife and for outdoor recreation," said Vilsack. "These areas also provide an important driver of economic opportunity and jobs in rural Colorado communities."

This proposed rule, in development since 2005, reflects the interests of thousands of Coloradans and stakeholders from across the country who contributed to its development.

"The Forest Service cares deeply about protecting Colorado's roadless areas," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "Through collaboration, I believe we have developed a proposal that will afford better, lasting protection to these treasured areas, and we welcome additional comments in order to develop a successful approach for conservation of this special resource."

The proposed Colorado Roadless Rule:

- Puts more than half a million acres into a higher category of protection than the 2001 Roadless Rule;
- Provides an updated inventory to protect high-quality backcountry areas with true roadless characteristics by removing substantially altered acres from the inventory and adding new acres containing a high level of roadless characteristics;
- Removes existing ski areas from the roadless inventory;
- Provides special protection for the headwaters of cutthroat trout streams;
- Provides flexibility for temporary road construction for underground coal activities, such as methane drainage wells, on 20,000 acres in the North Fork coal mining area; and
- Provides flexibility for temporary road construction for fuels treatments and ecosystem restoration to within one-half mile of communities.

The proposed Colorado Roadless Rule and Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be printed tomorrow in the Federal Register, but today are available for review and comment online either at the Office of the Federal Register's website or at the Forest Service website at <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/colorado.shtml> . Upon tomorrow's printing, the Forest Service will take comments on this proposed rule for 90 days. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell will consider public input prior to making the decision on the final Colorado Roadless Rule and EIS, which is expected to be signed in late 2011.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to states and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

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