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Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Finalizes Colorado Roadless Rule

DENVER, July 2, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack finalized the Colorado Roadless Rule today marking the culmination of a seven-year, public-involvement process that provides protection for Colorado's 4.2 million acres of national forest roadless areas.

"In addition to securing strong protections for roadless areas, the Colorado Roadless Rule will provide flexibility to restore and thin forests in roadless areas adjacent to communities, thereby helping to avoid catastrophic wildfires," said Vilsack. "The Colorado Roadless Rule will conserve our backcountry roadless areas which are vital for clean drinking water, recreational opportunities, and habitat for wildlife," said Vilsack.

"The Colorado Roadless Rule reflects the diverse, creative and passionate suggestions contributed by thousands of Coloradans," said Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper. "The rule adds new protections to millions of acres of our state's cherished national forests while providing sufficient, targeted flexibility crucial to local economies and communities."

"Finalizing the Colorado Roadless Rule, in cooperation with the State of Colorado, is a milestone for us all," said Dan Jirón, regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region. "More than 300,000 people and stakeholders provided thoughtful feedback during the rule-making process, which demonstrates how deeply people care for our national forests."

The final Colorado Roadless Rule:

- Has more protection than the 2001 Roadless Rule, while also providing flexibility to meet Colorado's unique needs;
- Allows more flexibility for communities to be protected from catastrophic wildfires with provisions for hazardous fuel treatment in urban areas that are near forests;
- Provides 1.2 million acres in a higher category of protection than 2001 Roadless Rule;

- Protects more roadless acres than the 2001 Rule by including an updated inventory that adds high-quality acres (409,500 acres) and removes areas (459,100 acres) where roadless characteristics were compromised;
- Addresses economic and job growth concerns by allowing more flexibility for existing ski areas and access for coal-mining-related activities within the North Fork area; and
- Does not affect valid existing rights in roadless areas such as valid existing oil and gas leases and the development rights or restrictions associated with those leases.

The final rule reflects the views and concerns of thousands of people who expressed interest during the rule-making process. From July 2006 to April 2011 there were five public comment periods resulting in more than 310,000 comments from people throughout the country.

There are 363 roadless areas across 4.2 million acres throughout Colorado located in eight national forests. Future forest plans and revisions will be consistent with the provisions of the Colorado Roadless Rule.

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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