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Agriculture Secretary and Colorado Governor Release Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Colorado Roadless Rule

DENVER, May 2, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper today announced the release of the final Environmental Impact Statement for the final Colorado Roadless Rule. The preferred alternative identified in the impact statement provides conservation for 4.2 million acres of National Forest roadless areas within Colorado. Today's announcement is the culmination of a seven-year collaborative process between the US Forest Service and State of Colorado.

"When finalized, this rule will provide a lasting commitment for the protection of roadless areas on our national forests, areas vital for water conservation, wildlife and for outdoor recreation," said Vilsack. "Colorado's roadless areas are also important for economic growth and development, providing opportunity for tourism and job development in rural communities."

"The new roadless rule represents a characteristically Colorado achievement," said Hickenlooper. "The rule adds landmark protections to millions of acres of our state's spectacular national forests by incorporating the diverse views of people and businesses across Colorado. The rule enhances all that makes Colorado special while at the same time providing a measure of flexibility that supports local economies and ensures communities can take steps to protect themselves from threats of wildfire."

"The alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the associated final rule language would increase protection for the unique values of Colorado's treasured roadless areas while providing flexibility in management to address the State's interests," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "Through extensive collaboration, the U.S. Forest Service and State of Colorado have developed a final rule that is the right prescription for the State's highly-valued forested lands."

The preferred alternative for the Colorado Roadless Rule:

- Has more protection than the 2001 Roadless Rule, while also providing flexibility to meet Colorado's unique needs;
- Provides 1.2 million acres in a higher category of protection than 2001 Rule;

- Allows more flexibility for communities to be protected from catastrophic wildfires with provisions for hazardous fuel treatment in urban areas that are near forests (Wildland Urban Interface areas);
- Protects more roadless acres than the 2001 Rule by including an updated inventory that adds high-quality acres (409,500 acres) not covered in the 2001 Rule 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 construction of methane venting associated with existing and future coal mining 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 preferred alternative 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. The final Colorado Roadless rule will be finalized a minimum of 30 days after the Final Environmental Impact Statement is published in the Federal Register.

There are 363 roadless areas across 4.2 million acres throughout Colorado located in eight National Forests, which would now be managed under the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule. 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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