

Information about | roadless areas and the economy

In the new West economy, the recreation, tourism, and quality-of-life benefits provided by our extraordinary and remote landscapes provide significant financial rewards. Colorado's last remaining roadless areas provide some of the best recreational opportunities in the country; failing to protect them potentially limits our ability to benefit from the economic potential that otherwise abounds both today and into the future.



Visitors enjoy a horsepacking expedition in the White River National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Wilderness Workshop

In Colorado's National Forests, it is the roadless areas that offer the highest quality elk populations for hunters and wildlife watchers, the most pristine watersheds for anglers and river runners, and the most natural experience for hikers, backpackers, and backcountry users of all stripes. In addition, roadless areas provide clean drinking water, protect precious habitat, and most likely offset the effects of global warming. Colorado's most valuable resources are those that can be utilized sustainably and in their natural state, not simply those that can be mined out, siphoned off, or chopped down.

Outdoor Recreation

As the outdoor recreation industry continues to grow, ever increasing numbers of Coloradans and out-of-state tourists alike visit the state's roadless areas to enjoy their world-class scenery, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for a true backcountry experience. These visitors pour money into local restaurants, hotels, outfitting operations, and gear shops. Strong local traditions of respecting the importance of outdoor lifestyles, coupled with a dramatic increase in the number of people enjoying a variety of outdoor activities, make the opportunity to utilize roadless areas for their unique value to recreationists ever more precious.

- Logging and wood products industries contribute less than one percent to the state's pool of jobs.¹ At the same time, millions of tourists and numerous new businesses and residents come to Colorado each year to enjoy Colorado's outstanding public wildlands, not to see clear-cuts and sediment-filled streams caused by logging and associated road building.

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Photo courtesy of Western Resource Advocates



A trio of hikers explores a roadless area in the Uncompahgre National Forest.

- In 2004, almost \$2.3 billion was spent in Colorado by hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers alone, with total spending on outdoor equipment and gear totaling \$1.3 billion in the same year.²
- Even after recently revising its calculations of the amount spent annually on recreation to a fraction of previous estimates, the Forest Service reports that recreation still makes up almost 60% of its programs' total contributions to the national economy.³
- Within the Forest Service, over 75% of jobs created are related to recreation, wilderness, and wildlife programs. As in the private sector, jobs related to recreation and wilderness management are more sustainable and of greater benefit to both the environment and the economies of surrounding communities than those in the more boom-and-bust prone extractive industries.⁴

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The Value of Healthy Ecosystems – Water, Climate, and Communities

Traditional accounting of economic costs and benefits does not take into account the value of the “ecosystem services” – such as air and water filtration and carbon sequestration – that roadless areas provide. Everyone needs clean air to breathe and clean water to drink; moreover, our forests, acting as carbon sinks, may be our last line of defense against global warming. The region’s projected growth will put continued strain on these limited resources.

- By acting as a filter for industrial pollutants and organic contaminants, roadless area ecosystems are critical to the fresh water resources that are estimated to be worth \$3.7 billion per year nationally.⁵
- In 2004, 400 scientists nationwide – including biologists and forest ecologists from Colorado – endorsed protection of all roadless areas from road-building, from commercial logging, and from mineral development, citing those lands’ importance for wildlife and ecological diversity, forest health, healthy watersheds and water supplies, and strength of local economies.
- Roadless areas provide unique opportunities for scientific research, attracting academic and industry scientists – and the funding that supports them – to Colorado.

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The Cost of Roads

Aside from the resources forever lost if Colorado’s roadless areas are destroyed, roads themselves actually cost taxpayers money. The public pays for the construction and maintenance of roads built in national forests – even roads constructed for the exclusive benefit of extractive industries.

- There are currently about 386,000 miles of roads – enough to encircle the earth 15 times – already in place on Forest Service lands across the country, many of these in disrepair or slated for removal and rehabilitation.⁶
- Before opening any new areas up to road-building, the Forest Service needs to address the nearly \$10 billion backlog of road maintenance and restoration projects⁷ (totaling approximately \$163 million in Colorado alone⁵) already overdue.
- Extractive industries like mining and logging make up over half of the Forest Service’s spending nationally, with timber costs alone amounting to more than recreation, wilderness, fish, wildlife, and rare plants combined. This figure is grossly out of proportion to these programs’ contributions to both the economy and the local job market.⁴

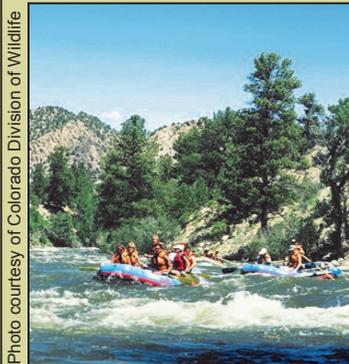


Photo courtesy of Colorado Division of Wildlife

River-running is just one of the activities enjoyed in our National Forests by both locals and visitors alike.

1 The Wilderness Society, 2005. www.tws.org

2 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2004

3 Stynes, D. J., White, E. M. “Spending Profiles of National Forest Visitors, NVUM Four Year Report.” 2005 <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/NVUM4YrSpending.pdf>

4 USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision) <http://www2.srs.fs.fed.us/strategicplan/index.htm>

5 Environment Colorado Research and Policy Center. “Our Natural Legacy: The Value of America’s Roadless National Forests” 2003

6 <http://www.wilderness.org/NewsRoom/Release/20050505.cfm>

7 Taxpayers for Common Sense, 2005. <http://www.taxpayer.net/forest/roadless/index.htm>

For more information, visit www.roadless.net or contact:

Vera Smith, Colorado Mountain Club 303.996.2746
Suzanne Jones, The Wilderness Society 303.996.2746 x102
Matt Garrington, Environment Colorado 303.573-3871 x310

Colorado's Forest Legacy
Protecting our wild forests, wildlife, and water