

## **Montana Roadless Working Group launches Web site Helena Independent Record**

By EVE BYRON - IR Staff Writer - 02/10/06

**Conservation, hunting and fishing groups launched a new Web site this week to provide information on the 6.4 million acres of roadless areas in Montana, as well as provide opportunities to comment on state and national proposals that might affect some of those National Forest lands.**

Governors were directed by President Bush last year to put together plans on how to manage what are known as "inventoried roadless areas," which may actually have some roads in them but are accessed mainly by trails.

Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer has asked county commissioners for their recommendations, but also is accepting comments from the public until March 1. The statewide Montana Roadless Working Group put together the Web site so people can search for areas where they like to recreate and find out whether those are part of an inventoried roadless area, according to Elizabeth Andrews, one of the group's organizers.

"This is a way of bringing together not just groups who ordinarily work with us but others who use these areas too," Andrews said Thursday. "We compiled information on one Web site so folks can see whether any of the areas they're frequenting are roadless areas or just regular public lands, like the (Bureau of Land Management). "People can go to the Web site and get a map of all the roadless areas in Lewis and Clark County, and the average citizen can see that the area they've been camping in for all those years was roadless."

Roadless areas around Helena include the well-known Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas as well as the lesser-known areas like Mount Baldy and Grassy Mountain in the Big Belt Mountains.

Bill Geer with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership urged Montanans to check out the Web site, then write letters to Schweitzer supporting roadless areas. "Roadless areas are sources of clean water for fishing, irrigating, boating, and drinking," Geer said. "According to the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana's unparalleled five-week big game hunting season depends on habitat security provided by roadless areas.

"The Forest Service and the governor need to take into account the value Montana's sportsmen and women place on roadless areas. Conserving Montana's backcountry will ensure a better future for hunting and fishing in Montana and for all Montanans who enjoy our great outdoors."

Andrews said that as more comment letters come into the governor's office from the 32 Montana counties that include roadless areas, they'll be posted to the website.

"We're trying to create a one-stop Web site with information on the roadless issue," Andrews said.

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