

Governor To Hold Roadless Rule Meetings Across Montana

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(HELENA) – At a news conference today at the Capitol, Governor Brian Schweitzer asked the Bush Administration to lend a hand to the states in fulfilling the President's recent mandate regarding the new roadless rule. Schweitzer also announced plans to meet with County Commissioners across the state to get their input.

Governor Schweitzer sent a letter to President Bush emphasizing the vital role that roadless areas play in Montana. In the letter, Schweitzer asked the President to detail staff to help Montana with this new mandate.

The Forest Service employs about 2,375 people in Montana, including foresters, biologists, hydrologists, geologists, soil scientists, ecologists, entomologists, range scientists, landscape architects, and public affairs specialists. The Forest Service budget in the state exceeds \$47 million. The State of Montana has 6,397,000 acres of roadless areas.

“The Governor's Office has one natural resource advisor. The federal government is asking the states to do its job, therefore, I feel it is appropriate to ask them for their assistance in completing their mandate,” said Governor Schweitzer.

The letter states, “...So Washington has the final say, and not Montanans. In short, shifting the responsibility for management of the nation's roadless areas to the states is simply passing the buck. Worse, it will undoubtedly have the additional effect of entangling the states in a quagmire of court battles.”

Montana, along with the other states has been asked to submit plans regarding their roadless lands. Governor Schweitzer is committed to meeting with County Commissioners to get their input.

“Decisions about roadless areas cannot be made without local input,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Like the Executive Branch, County Commissioners balance budgets and they maintain roads. Every area of Montana is distinct and counties with roadless areas within their boundaries have unique circumstances. I am committed to gathering input from the communities that are affected by this plan.”

The first scheduled meeting with County Commissioners is Thursday, June 16, in Libby.