



Montana Wildlife Federation

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Rocky Mountain Front Protection Moves Forward

Wildlife enthusiasts, ranchers, local business owners, backpackers, and hunters and anglers are thrilled with the move by Congress in the final hours of the 109th session to ban the federal government from new oil and gas drilling leases and hard rock mining on a 100 mile stretch of the Rocky Mountain Front (RMF).

Lawmakers considered and passed a tax-relief-cornucopia bill, with language authored by Sen. Max Baucus in the 11th hour, that prevents any future (new) oil, gas and hard rock mining leases on approximately 400,000 acres of RMF National Forest and BLM lands. A similar homegrown Appropriations measure crafted and introduced by Sen. Conrad Burns with the support of Front wildlife, hunting and ranching interests dead-ended when Congress delayed federal budget/appropriations approval.

Senator Baucus quickly and creatively stepped up to the plate with the measure that also provides tax incentives, tax breaks for oil companies that retire their existing leases on more than 100,000 acres. Many of these older leases were negotiated in the 1980s prior to a temporary moratorium on new leases in 1997 by then Lewis and Clark Forest Supervisor Gloria Flora. The Baucus measure is a wonderful win that permanently withdraws the public lands from any new development but does not resolve all of the challenges facing Front.

As reported in previous issues of Montana Wildlife, MWF is a member of the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front. The coalition of conservation organizations, local outdoor and wildlife interests, ranchers, outfitters, hikers, business owners and Front enthusiasts have been working together for several years on homegrown conservation packages to protect the Front because of its exceptional fish and wildlife resources. Travel planning, the existing leases and other development are still issues hanging over the Front.

MWF extends it's most sincere gratitude to Senator Baucus while assuring our membership and Coalition partners that we will continue to work diligently for long-term Front protective measures in the interest of our public wildlife, public lands and our hunting and angling heritage. We understand that we all use oil and gas and that energy development is needed, but we also believe that more focus needs to be placed on alternative energy and that – some places are too valuable to be developed. The Rocky Mountain Front is one of those very special places in Montana.

