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COLORADANS SEND PRES. BUSH A MESSAGE FROM THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN HEARTLAND: PROTECT OUR WILD FORESTS

*Conservation and Recreation Groups Rally in Estes Park
to Criticize President's Misleading Rocky Mountain 'Photo Op'*

Estes Park, Colorado -- Colorado's leading conservation and recreation groups criticized President Bush during his visit to Rocky Mountain National Park today for moving to open Colorado's premier public wildlands to oil and gas drilling, logging, and development. Representatives of the American Lands Alliance, Colorado Mountain Club, Sierra Club, and The Wilderness Society joined dozens of other Coloradans who greeted the President's entourage in downtown Estes Park with signs reading "Don't Drill Our Wildlands" and with a sea of tree stumps and oil rigs representing the "George W. Bush National Forest."

Twenty-one conservation and recreation groups on Monday wrote President Bush, inviting him to visit roadless areas in Colorado threatened by logging and petroleum development. The President, who is on what his staff have dubbed a "Home to the Heartland tour," has not responded to the invitation.

"No one should be fooled by President Bush's disingenuous photo opportunity," said Harlin Savage, Colorado Organizer for the American Lands Alliance. "While he clears a few feet of trail for the cameras here, back in Washington his Administration is pushing plans that could lead to bulldozing, chainsawing, and drilling in some of the last wild lands on national forests in Colorado."

Savage noted that the Bush Administration is currently working to weaken the Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule, an enormously popular policy that would protect 4.4 million acres of roadless forests in Colorado from road building and commercial logging. "Poll after poll has shown that the vast majority of Coloradans want these lands protected," Savage said, "and we've invited the President to talk to these people, many of whom live near national forests. Unfortunately, when it comes to protecting our public lands, the Bush Administration seems uninterested in what the public has to say. He's only listening to lobbyists for the timber, oil and gas, and mining companies."

The Bush Administration is currently moving to weaken the Conservation Rule, adopted earlier this year, which would protect the last 30 percent -- 58.5 million acres -- of inventoried roadless areas in the

National Forest System. More than half of our national forests have already been roaded, mined, logged, and developed.

The groups also spoke out against the Administration's shortsighted initiatives to drill for oil and gas in the nation's remote and scenic places, many of which are in Colorado's Rocky Mountains.

"The President's energy policies could turn Colorado and the West into a sacrifice zone for panic development of short-term energy supplies," said Steve Smith of the Sierra Club. "When that targeting includes our national monuments, potential wilderness areas, and other wildlands, that panic goes too far. We need an energy policy that is quicker, cleaner, cheaper and safer than what the President has proposed."

The President continues to propose expanded energy production without serious attention to energy efficiency or renewable energy sources. At the President's urging, the House of Representatives recently approved oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, even after refusing to approve modest improvements to energy efficiency standards for light trucks and sport utility vehicles.

"Colorado could supply all of its new electrical demand for the state for the next 20 years through wind power alone," said Ryan DeWald, staff attorney for the Colorado Public Interest Research Group. "This would significantly reduce the need for fossil fuel exploration and development in the Rockies."

"No one who lives in Colorado or visits the state wants to go hiking or fishing in a clearcut or heavily roaded areas," said Vera Smith, Conservation Policy Director for the Colorado Mountain Club. "Our high quality of life and thriving tourism industry depend on beautiful public wild lands where people can hike, bike, fish, and hunt. If we lose these places, we threaten the state's economic well-being and the recreational opportunities that make Colorado a great state to live in and visit."

The Bush Administration's proposal to weaken the Conservation Rule is currently undergoing official review. The public can learn more about the Rule by visiting www.ourforests.org, or www.wilderness.org/standbylands/roadless/index.htm. Comments can be sent directly to roadless_anpr@fs.fed.us. A copy of Monday's letter to President Bush is available from Leslie Kaas Pollock at 303-444-1188 x216.

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