



## ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT UPDATE

Montana's Rocky Mountain Front has long been the starting point for new and innovative approaches to land and wildlife management. The storied history of wildlife conservation in Montana has roots in the Sun River Game Preserve and the Sun River Wildlife Management Area located along the Front. Early transplants of big horn sheep came from this iconic landscape to restore huntable populations to mountain ranges that were once barren. The strongest population of grizzly bear in the lower 48 survives today within the Front due to historical collaboration conservation approaches. It also supplies rich grazing land for ranchers, open spaces, and access to world class hunting opportunities; 10 big-game species thrive on the Front. The Rocky Mountain Front provides some of the highest quality wildlife habitats and is among Montana's most treasured landscapes!

MWF has worked on Front issues since it was first organized 74 years ago and we continue this work today. The Front remains much as it has for centuries due to the commitment by local residents to 'keep it the way it is'. MWF and the stewardship of hunters, ranchers, conservationists and people who know that this landscape is truly one of the last, best places not only in Montana, but in the entire United States have made a difference.

This can all change. Changing administrations, political will, energy demands, and threats from invasive weeds require decisive, timely action or the Front could no longer be in the top one percent of wildlife habitats in North America. This is why a coalition of hunters, wildlife enthusiasts, ranchers, business owners, recreationists, and local decision makers, the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front is seeking to introduce a Conservation Package that will forever ensure the Front's viability for all uses.

This package is groundbreaking on several fronts:

**Invasive Weeds** – Public land management agencies would be mandated to aggressively fight invasive species and to increase their level of engagement with local weed roundtables, counties, game managers, and ranchers. Ultimately, the Coalition's aim is to increase the level of funding for the federal agencies and counties to ensure that adequate resources are in place to eradicate, control, and prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

**Conservation Management Area** – Over two-thirds of the land within the Conservation Package would be placed in a new designation called a Conservation Management Area that seeks to protect not only the landscape, but current uses such as livestock grazing, horse and foot travel, and even off road vehicle and snowmobile use from future whims of political appointees of all stripes. Entering the vast majority of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District into a Management Area will ensure that all uses currently on the Forest will have a place in the future.

**Wilderness Additions** – One of the ways to provide long-term protection of public lands that have documented wild qualities is through congressionally mandated wilderness designations. Our inclusions have been tested not only through the Forest Services' own evaluation method, but they have also been ground-truthed by folks who live and work along the Front. The Coalition has logged hundreds of hours talking with outfitters, recreationists, hunters, and grazing allotment permittees to find conservative, appropriate, and meaningful areas truly worthy of the Wilderness designation.

This Conservation Package represents more than seven years of grassroots, ground-up work by the Coalition in an effort to conserve one of Montana's most iconic landscapes. We have worked with local stakeholders, interest groups and elected officials in the hopes of creating a proposal that has a broad range of support, benefits the land, and encompasses all aspects of use along the Front. As we prepare to present the Package to folks across Montana, we are outreaching to MWF members and affiliates. We want your input and support for this new, innovative and compelling proposal. For more information regarding the Conservation Package, please call or email Ben Lamb, Conservation Director for State and National Issues at [blamb@mtwf.org](mailto:blamb@mtwf.org), and (406) 458-0227, xtn 108.