



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WILD



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Objection Filed on Proposed Land Exchange At Wolf Creek Pass

Monte Vista, CO - Today a coalition of conservation organizations announce the filing of a 96-page Objection with the Forest Service concerning a proposed land exchange near Wolf Creek Pass. The land exchange would allow construction of a city in a high-altitude location that receives an average of 428 inches of snow annually, and is an important wildlife corridor for many species. The development, called the Village at Wolf Creek, has been at the center of controversy since 1986.

The Forest Service proposal would trade approximately 205 federal acres for 177 acres of private land within the boundaries of the Rio Grande National Forest. As a part of this exchange, the U.S. Government is also paying Texas billionaire Red McCombs \$70,000 as a "cash equalization payment." The land exchange would connect the private land to U.S. Highway 160, thus securing the ability for a larger population to access to the developer's private inholding.

"Our Objection makes clear that the Forest Service has added insult to injury by proposing to give away more land with valuable resources to a rich private interest", said Matt Sandler, staff attorney for Rocky Mountain Wild who led the preparation of the Objection. "Instead, the agency should consider protecting a biologically rich and important portion of the National Forest and represent the best interests of the American public", stated Sandler.

Opponents to the land exchange argue that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that provides the basis for the Forest Service decision is inadequate and incomplete. Of special concern is the lack of analysis of the impacts of the development on the rare Canada lynx.

"If the land exchange is ultimately implemented, it could lead to a city of up to 10,000 people being constructed near the top of Wolf Creek Pass, right in the middle of a corridor for lynx", said Christine Canaly, Executive Director of the San Luis Valley Ecosystem

Council. "Such activity in this area could seriously impair the chances for this threatened species to recover to a full, secure population in Colorado", noted Canaly.

Additionally, opponents note in their objection that the land exchange violates the Forest Service mandate to manage lands in a sustainable manner for the public at large.

"The Forest Service's Record of Decision for the proposed mega-development on Wolf Creek Pass constitutes yet another denial of the public interest, both through their continued refusal to acknowledge their legal standing to curtail this grotesque project and also in refusing to concede that most local citizens stand in strong opposition to it," adds Jimbo Buickerood, Public Land Coordinator for the San Juan Citizens Alliance.

The Forest Service now has 45 days to review and react to objections on the land exchange proposal. The Service may take an additional 30 days if they deem it necessary to provide an adequate response.

"Given the delays and foot dragging we have seen to date, I anticipate the Forest Service will take the maximum amount of time to complete its review ", states Sandler. "Whenever they finish, we will still be here. We intend to keep challenging this project."

The Objection was submitted by Rocky Mountain Wild, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Wilderness Workshop, Colorado Mountain Club, EcoFlight, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative.

The Objection and 38 supporting exhibits can be found at:

<http://friendsofwolfcreek.org/wolf-creek-access-project-administrative-objection-exhibits>

Stay updated with information at:

- <http://friendsofwolfcreek.org>
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