



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

STOP THE PUBLIC LANDS GIVEAWAY! Support the Rep. Mark Udall Amendment

National Parks, Wilderness, and other public lands threatened by the Administration's policies on R.S. 2477

In the last four years, the Administration has developed two policies to giveaway roads and trails across National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and all other public lands (including military installations) to states, counties, and special interests. In 2003 and 2006, the Administration decided to put forward policies [the disclaimer rule and Norton policy respectively] to administratively validate claims under R.S. 2477– the loophole in a repealed 1866 mining law that allowed for highway construction over public lands. By allowing states and counties to assert road claims, the Administration would disqualify areas for Wilderness designation and turn over management of road and trails across western public lands to those states and counties.

The latest policy drafted by former Interior Secretary Norton – during her final ten days in office –provides that:

- The Interior Department can give away claimed routes as highways through National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Wilderness Study Areas, and Wilderness areas;
- Hiking trails, off-road vehicle routes, dog sled routes, and other primitive trails and routes can qualify as R.S. 2477 highways; and,
- Counties can maintain asserted R.S. 2477 highways claims without even contacting, let alone getting approval from, the affected land management agency.

Since Secretary Norton issued this policy, the BLM has started to review a dozen claims around the West with many more claims waiting in the wings.

Colorado

Last October, a county submitted five R.S. 2477 claims to the BLM for review under the Norton policy. Some claims are currently walking trails that the county is interested in opening for motorized vehicles use. Most of these trails cut through or border wilderness study areas near Vermillion Basin and through Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge.

- **Hoy Trail** runs through Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge and Diamond Breaks Wilderness Study Area. Some portions of the route are not visible on the ground.
- **Cross Mountain** is claimed through a portion that is closed to motor vehicle use and another portion in the Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area.
- **Douglas Mountain/Five Springs** borders two Wilderness Study Areas and only part of it appears on the maps submitted by the county



Cross Mountain "Route"



Five Springs "Route"

This county has 53 miles of claims in the Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge, 240 miles of claims in Dinosaur National Monument, 117 miles within BLM-designated Wilderness Study Areas, and miles within every Wilderness Study Area (WSA), and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the county. The county has also submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service claims in Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge, but it has not submitted maps with the locations on them.

Urgent Threat

Once the first several claims are validated, we can expect many more than those described above. We can also expect that the following claims will be controversial and result in significant impacts to wilderness character, cultural sites, visual resources and other public values.

We believe that once a single claim is validated under the new policy, the Administration will have established a process that they will replicate all over the West. Several land managers are waiting for one claim to move forward before acknowledging other requests from counties. The time to close the floodgates is now; next year may be too late.

Support Rep. Mark Udall's Amendment to the Interior Appropriations Bill to End this Public Lands Giveaway!

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