

## RE: Forest Service public meetings on the roadless initiative

Contributed by Jason Wright  
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"The Forest Service must be honest and on-the-record with the American people", former U.S. Senator Malcolm Wallop said today regarding the scoping meetings scheduled around the country. He announced an effort by his group, Frontiers of Freedom, to get citizens to "stand up and be counted" at each meeting held across the country. He especially encouraged those communities surrounding U.S. Forests to attend the scheduled meetings set up by the Forest Service and to make sure their comments are recorded and put into the official record.

Noting the difference between an open house and a public hearing, Wallop said the Forest Service had used the open house technique with the road moratorium. "People traveled long distances only to see a video of Forest Chief Mike Dombeck and maps on the walls. There was no public dialogue, no open question-and-answer sessions and nothing went into the record except comments made out of public earshot."

According to Wallop the Chief of the Forest Service told the House Resources Committee recently he wanted public comment on the nature and scope of the environmental, social and economic issues related to roadless areas. Despite hectic holiday schedules the Chief only allowed comments to be given until December 20th. "You have to wonder why they seem to be in such a rush to get through this process", Wallop said.

"This administration instigated a road building moratorium at the beginning of the year. Not satisfied with their first "time out", they have now determined they need to provide "long-term" protection for over 40 million acres" Wallop said. "Regardless of the terms they use to justify their position, they are creating wilderness. Even the Chief admitted in the Senate hearing the new acreage would be managed as wilderness."

Frontiers of Freedom - Rocky Mountains joined with the Wyoming Timber Industry Association in filing a lawsuit against the government when the road moratorium was announced in February of this year. That case has not been finalized. Commenting on the lawsuit, the former Senator who was also chief sponsor of the Wyoming Wilderness Act said, "I remain committed to my believe that Congress is the only legally recognized body that may establish wilderness."

Wallop said the reason his group is working to get people to comment is a fundamental premise of the organization. "We are a grassroots citizen's organization committed to making government responsive to the people. If the agency truly wants to hear public input they shouldn't have any qualms about allowing everyone to be heard on the record. The people whose lives are most affected by this decision must demand to be heard as the process begins."

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