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Filming in the Rocky Mountain Region

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It's an enormous challenge in today's economic climate to entice filmmaking into your State. Ever since Governor Bill Richardson's highly successful incentives program in 2003 attracted over 80 feature films and television projects from Hollywood into New Mexico's alluring landscape, the State legislatures further north have had little choice but to raise the stakes to compete. This feature takes a look at the latest campaigns being waged to secure both highly lucrative big budget clients and smaller independent film productions to help boost the economies of the scenically spectacular Rocky Mountain States.

MONTANA

One simply needs to take a drive along the precipitous cliffs of Glacier National Park to get an immediate sense of the grandeur of Montana. Alpine meadows straight from Aslan's hunting grounds surround an environment flush with crystal blue lakes and steep white peaks. Raging rivers have catered to the careers of Meryl Streep and long desolate roads have been blessed by Forest Gump's feet.

The Big Sky on the Big Screen Act adds to this natural wealth of locations providing a 14-percent refundable tax credit based on hired Montana labor with no cap and no minimum spend. With no sales tax, nor a bed tax with stays longer than 30 days, the Film Commission has recently announced Studio 406, a bundling of all the incentives

"Montana is offering filmmakers something other states don't, a solid cash incentive backed up with an entire list of extra incentives that save the production significant money and make the entire shoot enjoyable," says Montana Film Office Manager, Sten Iversen.

Also included is a nine-percent refundable tax credit for all production-related expenditures made with Montana businesses, production service providers, and subcontractors. Montana offers free location scouting, traffic control signage — and even production office furniture and equipment. Vehicle licensing exemptions make it easier for out of state production companies as well.

With no minimum spend and no financial incentives caps, Montana would be an ideal setting for independent filmmakers and big-budget productions alike. Some of the latest features shot this year include: *My Sister's Keeper* starring Cameron Diaz, "Expedition Grizzly" to be featured on the **National Geographic Channel** and *Call of the Wild*



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being shot in 3D.

IDAHO

If all has gone to plan by this article's release, then Idaho will have received a one million dollar pot to furnish the Motion Media Rebate Program which helps implement a 20-percent rebate for all qualifying productions on all goods and services purchased in Idaho. To qualify, productions need to spend at least \$200,000 within the State and 25 percent of the crew members must be resident in Idaho. With a \$500,000 cap it is hoped that this latest round of incentives will attract films financed around \$2 to \$5 million.

Like Montana, Idaho's long summery days are ideal for filming in locations as varied as desert vistas — featuring North America's biggest dunes in Bruneau — and volcanic craters utilized in films like *Dante's Peak*. Production personnel who are staying 30 days or more in Idaho lodging facilities are totally exempt from sales and lodging taxes, currently at 8 percent. Renowned for its friendly and cooperative spirit, Idaho generally offers reasonable prices on lodging, goods and services to further entice filmmakers, adding much needed competition to neighbouring states like Utah whose rebate program has seen the return of \$12 to every dollar spent over the past five years.

WYOMING



Mountain plains roll into the horizon of Wyoming, a land where Kevin Costner once danced with wolves and *Flicka* runs wild. On the other side of these dynamic escarpments lie diverse desert terrain and canyons — the sort of badlands where *Starship Troopers* waged galactic warfare and even Stephen Spielberg found a home for his closest alien encounters.

The Film Industry Financial Incentive (FIFI) program provides a cash rebate program up to 15 percent on dollars spent in the State. There must be at least \$200,000 spent to qualify — which was recently amended from \$500,000 — and the rebate percentages between 12 to 15 ranges from the lowest rate, if Wyoming is simply mentioned in the credits to the highest when the actual storyline takes place there itself. Qualified expenditures include all production work fees paid to Wyoming residents, and any goods and services utilized or made within the State.

With a long motion picture history ranging back to 1904, there is solid production team support — in particular, animal handlers — and the only cap to the current incentives program is what is existing in the State coffers at the time, which was last reported at \$2 million. This should ensure the State will not miss out again the majority of filming, such as it did with the mega-blockbuster *Brokeback Mountain*. The script was set in Wyoming but Director Ang Lee chose to film mostly in Canada because of the more attractive incentives offered at the time. The **Wyoming Film Office** has also asked Wyoming businesses to offer production companies an additional 10 percent discount on production related services.

UTAH

From the spectacular orange organ pipes of Bryce Canyon to the mountainous city vistas from Salt Lake City — take it from *Thelma and Louise* — Utah is a cinematographic adventure in itself. One need simply wander through the ancient red gateways of Arches National Park to imagine what it must be like to be stranded deep in the heart of Mars. In fact all our solar system's planets can be replicated within Utah's scenic extravaganza. (Something Stanley Kubrick possibly learned upon shooting *2001: A Space Odyssey*.)

Headed by Marshall Moore, Utah's film industry successes created 1700 jobs in 2007 and 2008 and has just recently upped its Motion Picture Incentive Fund rebate from 15 to 20 percent with Senate Bill 14 extending its post performance rebate capped at \$500,000 to an available tax credit when budgets exceed this. (These caps are what prevented the State from securing interested bids from big budget films like *Transformers* and *GI Joe*.)

With qualifying productions needing to first spend \$1 million, Governor Jon Huntsman has been pushing for the legislature to utilize \$15 million in Federal Stimulus spending to up their incentives program in the hope of making Utah the top filmmaking state in the country. Beginning July 1, 2009 there will be \$10 million available in Utah's state coffers and it is hoped an overall increase in up to 4500 jobs. Utah's current movies in production include *Frozen* and *Snowmen* (starring Christopher Lloyd), as well as *The Assignment* in postproduction.

COLORADO

According to the Film Commission's Deputy Director Marcia Morgan, there have been various gains on last year's campaigning efforts to lobby their legislature to pass an additional 10 million funding to enhance the current incentives program. The HB 1010 legislation was approved by the House Finance Committee. However, the House Appropriations Committee determined that such funding couldn't be found in today's economic climate where over 1 billion is being cut from all budgets until 2010.



The **Colorado Film Commission** had been trying to extend its current cash rebate of 10 percent on below the line spending to between 15 and 23 percent to make the State more competitive. Out-of-state productions must