

Dear Senators Tester and Daines, and Congressman Gianforte,

Montana is special because of our wildlands and wildlife and our ability to work together for the good of our state in all of its diversity.

Our unbroken prairies teem with herds of elk and other big game that underpin our outdoor traditions. Our headwaters flow from unspoiled forests and mountains and merge as blue-ribbon trout streams and serve as drinking water for our communities. All of these quiet places enable world-renowned backcountry experiences that sustain our \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy, the largest sector of our state's overall economy.

Our untrammeled public lands set Montana apart from other states. They also reflect the shared wild legacy that defines us as a people and makes us proud to live here.

That legacy has endured thanks to the protection we've given our most untamed lands, especially those we've managed as wilderness study areas.

In our national forests, these areas include Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn in the heart of the Gallatin Range, West Pioneers, Blue Joint, Sapphires, Ten Lakes, Middle Fork Judith, and the Big Snowies. Among the public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, these areas include the Centennial Mountains in the southwest corner of the state, the Terry Badlands in the east, Bitter Creek along the Hi-Line, and 34 other landscapes scattered across the state.

We agree that it's time to decide on how these areas should be managed in the long-term. But we believe that any management decisions regarding any wilderness study area must involve a diverse group of stakeholders working together at the local level towards agreement and mutual benefit.

We write to ask for your assistance in developing and enacting sensible legislation for Montana's wilderness study areas that will preserve our state's wild legacy and follow a commonsense set of principles.

Any such legislation must:

- Begin with a clear, bi-partisan commitment to getting results in Washington D.C.
- Be the outcome of a collaborative process that includes various stakeholders, and not force a one-size-fits all solution.
- Recognize the history of collaborative dialogue in Montana and past legislative compromise.
- Be fair, transparent, inclusive, and fact-based so as to produce outcomes that are implementable and durable.

- Include public input gathered from communities closest to the areas at issue in the proposal, while recognizing these public lands belong to all Americans.

Ten Lakes, Blue Joint, Bitter Creek, and other wilderness study areas across the state represent the best of Montana in all its diversity, as do the wildlife, fish, water and outdoor recreation economy that rely on these cherished places.

We're calling on our elected officials to handle these places with the respect they deserve. The lifeblood of our state depends on it.

Sincerely,