



To All Members of the Montana Wilderness Association
A Special Letter from the MWA Governing Council:

As the spring sun warms the land and the breeze ruffles the grasses and trees of our cherished wild places, our thoughts are on the wild country of Montana. We are united by our love of wild places.

We want to make an extra effort to stay connected with our members around the state. We work hard to represent our diverse membership and we certainly seek good communication in both directions. In this letter we hope to convey a little about the vision that drives our actions, and also to solicit any thoughts and comments you may have.

This is an exciting time for wild land conservation in Montana. We are making excellent progress with the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA)—a bill that when passed will forever protect 677,000 acres of the finest, most pristine Montana lands as Wilderness Areas. MWA is a strong supporter of Senator Tester's FJRA and was instrumental in the partnerships that resulted in the bill. But we also realize that, just like every other Wilderness bill that has been proposed in the past, some people are unhappy with it, even some respected champions of wild country. The bill is making a lot of headlines and the outstanding conservation features of the bill are often overshadowed in the news.

FJRA Creates 20 new Wilderness Areas and more than doubles the number of Wilderness Areas in Montana from 15 to 35.

An important reality that has shaped our council's path is that Montana has not seen a single acre of our state's outstanding wilderness protected in 26 years. From this fact we have concluded that some of our approaches from the past are not working today. If we want to protect wilderness, we need to find allies and win broader community support.

The good news is that a great many Montanans share our love for the wild beauty and wild creatures of our state. More good news is that we have learned that connecting with these people is not so much about compromising as it is about working together with communities and forest users whose goals overlap our own. Powerful coalitions and support can result from this process.

The bad news is that the process leaves us open to a lot of criticism. We want to briefly address some of the specific concerns you may have heard and wondered about. Some of these are very frustrating to us, because they are simply untrue, but have gained credence from being repeated over and over. **We want you to know that FJRA does not weaken or suspend any environmental laws or regulations, and does not direct any activities towards roadless areas. In fact the bill specifies that heavily roaded areas be prioritized for active restoration and management.**

The MWA Council wants to stress to our members that we believe FJRA will work very well on the ground. Of course we are thrilled that some 70% of Montanans support the bill and that we now have a good chance to break the long wilderness drought in Montana. But what is most important to us is that FJRA will permanently protect a lot of truly magnificent wild country.

**For more Information,
see “Reasons Why
Conservationists
Support FJRA” on
our MWA homepage
www.wildmontana.org**

Below you will find the names and hometowns of all current MWA council members. We have all endorsed this letter. We encourage you to contact any of us with any suggestions or concerns you may have.

Thanks for your support for wilderness!

Daphne Herling, President
Missoula

Scott Friskics
Great Falls

Carolyn Parrish
Billings

Doug Ferrell, President-Elect
Trout Creek

Michael Gottlieb
Helena

Kassia Randzio
Missoula

Sally Hughes, Treasurer
Livingston

Jeff Hunnes
Billings

David Rockwell
Dixon

Bob Bayley
Ennis

Roger Jenkins
Bozeman

Bernard Rose
Billings

Pete Bengeyfield
Dillon

Gerry Jennings
Great Falls

Kate Sako
East Glacier

Dan Bennett
Great Falls

Mollie Kieran
aka Molly Montana
Troy

Marianne Spitzform
Missoula

Steve Caldwell
Livingston

Stephanie Knisley
Helena

Janis Lee Taylor
Kalispell

Kim Dale
Helena

Terry Meyers
Kalispell

Samantha Travis
Kalispell



ADDRESSING
SPECIFIC CONCERNS

FOREST JOBS AND RECREATION ACT

LOGGING AND RESTORATION

Active forest management under FJRA uses stewardship projects to meet specific goals for restoring and improving forest conditions. These goals include reducing road densities, diversifying timber stands, and applying excellent science based standards for restoring native trout and grayling, clean streams, and elk and grizzly habitat.

The question about logging levels in FJRA is best addressed by looking at the big picture. Most concerns about the forest management component of FJRA are focused on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge

National Forest, which covers 3.3 million acres. After 10 years, 2% of the forest would receive mechanical treatment under FJRA. Some of those acres would be thinned and some logged, but typically no more than a third of the timber volume would be removed per acre. No permanent roads would be constructed under FJRA.

We find it hard to characterize this as excessive logging. We also appreciate that much of the popular support for FJRA results from our success in building partnerships with Montana timber mills.

OPEN PROCESS

Another complaint we hear is that some coalition plans that form the basis for the bill were not open enough, and that some opinions have been ignored. We regret that some groups have felt excluded, and we have learned some good lessons about maintaining open dialog with diverse groups. But more than one hundred open meetings have been held as the agreements and legislation have proceeded. Senator Tester has thoroughly

demonstrated his commitment to an open process based on engagement with a very large number of diverse groups and interests. It is also true that some groups confuse the issue of being heard with the issue of being heeded. Many observers have remarked that much criticism of FJRA comes from people and groups that either oppose the designation of any new Wilderness, or oppose almost all logging on public lands.

METCALF WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

An important question for Montana conservationists is proposed management of WSAs in the Sapphires and West Pioneers, designated by the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 sponsored by Senator Lee Metcalf. Conservationists understandably question whether these WSAs would be better protected under current management, than under FJRA.

The answer lies in the reality that the U.S. Forest Service has recommended no wilderness in the Sapphires and the West Pioneers, and currently allows motorized recreation. We believe FJRA represents an excellent effort to permanently protect the vast majority of this wild country

from future threats, and that it represents a great improvement over the current situation.

Under FJRA most affected WSA acres in the Sapphires would be designated wilderness (53,000 acres) 5,000 acres would remain open to snowmobiles and 37,500 acres on the Bitterroot National Forest would remain in WSA status. All of the West Pioneers WSA would be permanently designated as two wilderness units (26,000 acres) imbedded within a vast backcountry recreation area (129,000 acres). The proposed backcountry recreation designation prohibits mining, oil and gas, timber, new roads and development while allowing bicycles and snowmobiles. Legal OHV use may continue but may not expand to quiet trails and areas.

For more Information, see "Reasons Why Conservationists Support FJRA" on our MWA homepage www.wildmontana.org