

**Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests  
of the  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
December 17, 2009**

Testimony of Tim Baker, Legislative Campaign Director of the Montana Wilderness Association, in Support of S.1470, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of S. 1470, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009. At the outset, I want to thank Chairman Wyden and this Subcommittee for considering this important piece of legislation. I also want to express my deep gratitude to Senators Tester and Baucus for their sponsorship and active support of S. 1470.

**About the Montana Wilderness Association**

The mission of the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) is to protect Montana's wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions, now and for future generations.

The Montana Wilderness Association was founded 51 years ago by Montana hunters, conservationists and small business owners to prevent further loss of Montana's wilderness heritage. Our founders were instrumental in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, and MWA subsequently led the fight to win designation for virtually every wilderness area in the state, including the Scapegoat, Absaroka-Beartooth, Rattlesnake, Lee Metcalf, Great Bear, and Welcome Creek, as well as Wild and Scenic designations for the Flathead and Missouri rivers.

Today, MWA has over 5,000 members. Our members view Montana's remaining wild country as a public trust that should be managed so Montanans will always have access to great hunting, fishing, camping under the stars, and quiet mountain trails.

For the reasons described below, we strongly support this visionary legislation:

**Wilderness Designation and Montana**

Everything we love about Montana is tied together by its natural heritage. Whether it's the musky scent of elk and thunder of hooves under the trees, or the plaintive song of a hermit thrush on a summer evening, Montanans are closely tied to the land. The opening words of our Montana Constitution, adopted in 1972, reflect this deep relationship:

*"We the people of Montana, grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of the rolling plains ...."*

Wilderness embodies core American values of freedom, self-reliance, and community. Wilderness designation keeps our wildest places intact for our families and communities. It's a commitment that doesn't dissolve with market trends or administrations – one that we can pass on to our kids and grandkids. Over the years, we've learned that without this commitment, these wild places will vanish.

Thanks to the strong leadership of Montana Senator Lee Metcalf, many wild places received permanent protection, up to the time of Metcalf's death in 1978. In 1983, the Montana Congressional Delegation came together in bipartisan fashion to honor Metcalf's legacy, protecting over 250,000 acres as the Lee Metcalf Wilderness complex.

Yet it has now been 26 years since Congress designated new wilderness in Montana. Montana today remains one of only two western states that did not pass a statewide wilderness bill in the 1980s and 1990s (Idaho is the other). Worse, Montana is the only state to have a wilderness bill vetoed, in 1988, when President Reagan pocket vetoed a statewide bill after Congress had adjourned. Consequently, there are many wild places on public land that should have been designated as wilderness many years ago, but remain unprotected today.

Subsequent to 1988, several laudable efforts were made by the Montana Delegation to fashion a statewide wilderness bill, but the issue had become too contentious to resolve. The fallout from the presidential veto was incredibly bitter and divisive. At the same time, the bigger issue of national forest management in Montana became the new battleground. As deserving wild country remained unprotected, with some areas lost forever to roads, motors and indifference, the state's timber industry faced a steep decline driven by a host of factors, one of which included supply.

### **Toward a New Future**

A few years ago I stopped by the Montana Stockgrowers meeting. They had a big poster that said "Keeping Montana Montana." I thought to myself, I'm all for that, too. We might have different ideas about what that means, but I'll bet we have more in common than not.

Montanans have always relied on each other. So we still stop on the road to help a stranded motorist. We shovel the snow off our neighbor's sidewalk. We stop and talk with strangers at the coffee shop. We pay attention to a handshake.

That's the Montana that brought my father here, and then brought me here over 28 years ago. That's the Montana that keeps me here today.

It's because of the land and the landscape. We're all affected by it, even if in different ways. The country is so big and awe-inspiring, it makes you humble. It can be so unforgiving that we know we had better stick together.

But like much of the intermountain West, Montana is changing, and those changes affect all of us. As our valleys fill up with strip malls and traffic, and open space becomes scarcer, our wildest public lands only become more valuable to us – for wildlife, water quality, recreation, and refuge. In the future there is only one certainty: more people and more pressure on our public lands. At the same time, our public forests are facing unprecedented challenges from a changing climate that is threatening our world-class fisheries and wildlife, and dramatically increasing the risks associated with wildfire.

Our economy is changing, too, with difficult circumstances for many folks, including those in the timber industry and rural Montana. The small mills in Montana are struggling and so are the rural communities that depend on them – places like Deer Lodge, Seeley Lake, and Townsend. We'll need these mills in the future to do restoration work, especially to protect our fisheries and wildlife habitat. But beyond that, we care about these people and these rural communities – these are our neighbors and our friends.

These are trying times. So once again, Montanans need to rely on each other.

If there were just one forest collaborative effort in Montana, one could easily dismiss it as an isolated occurrence, driven by a single personality or set of unique conditions. However, S. 1470 encompasses three such collaborations, in different parts of the state, with many diverse interests and players. Recent polling shows public support in Montana for S. 1470 well over 65 percent. Montanans know we all need to work together to tackle these big problems.

All three of these collaborations have one overriding objective: they seek to create a positive, productive, and predictable environment in which the Forest Service can accomplish those important things that we all want for our national forests: robust working forests, improved fish and wildlife habitat, enhanced recreational opportunities, reduced fire risk to communities, healthy local economies, and permanent protection of Montana's most beloved wild places.

The Forest Service shares these objectives, as found in Region One's own Integrated Restoration Management Strategy. Our hope is that S. 1470 can provide the agency with the tools it needs to meet these critical objectives. We all want the agency to succeed.

S. 1470 is a step toward that new future, where diverse interests come together around a common vision for our national forests. To that end, S. 1470 faithfully embraces the following three collaborations that have sprouted in Montana:

### ***The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Partnership***

The founding members of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Partnership include five wood products companies and three conservation groups (Sun Mountain Lumber, Pyramid Mountain Lumber, R-Y Timber, Roseburg Forest Products, Smurfit-Stone Container, National Wildlife Federation, Montana Trout Unlimited, Montana Wilderness Association).

The group came together in 2006 during the forest planning process on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. After four months of intense discussions over the draft forest plan, the group drafted a proposed strategy for the agency to consider during the planning process, which was centered on three primary objectives:

First, wilderness designation for the most pristine public lands on the forest, for future generations to enjoy.

Second, a timber base on the forest that ensured a predictable and adequate supply of logs for Montana's independent mills, providing valuable jobs for Montanans and Montana communities.

Third, a focus on getting restoration work done on the forest, using stewardship contracts to improve fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

After releasing the draft Partnership strategy to the public in April 2006, the Beaverhead Partners immediately set out to meet with the public and interested groups to explain the strategy and listen to input. Since then, the Partners have worked together to meet with thousands of Montanans, attending hundreds of meetings and other forums that range from public meetings with the Forest Service, Rotary and Chamber luncheons, County Commission meetings, and county fairs to smaller gatherings with grazers, sportsmen, motorized users, and environmental groups. We worked actively with cycling clubs, backcountry horsemen, other conservation groups, motorized users, and many others, to make changes to the proposal.

In soliciting input and being open to changes to the draft strategy, the Partnership was also building public support, and asking those providing input to "come join us." Productive meetings with folks who shared our spirit of cooperation resulted in many changes to the proposal, or the conclusion that no changes were necessary.

Naturally, not all of the outreach efforts were successful. Some groups had little or no interest in discussing a real resolution of differences. Others, like the Beaverhead County Commissioners, engaged in discussion but then refused to respond when specific and significant offers were made to address their concerns.

But the work of the Partners garnered the praise of statewide elected officials from both parties – not to mention the praise of seven other county commissions, and groups as diverse as

the Montana Wildlife Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Montana Logging Association.

The final Forest Plan for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest moved significantly in the direction of the Partnership strategy, but fell short of providing the type of predictability that was the linchpin for the Partnership strategy. Since the Forest Plan, in general terms, is primarily a planning document and not an action decision, this is understandable. S. 1470 picks up where the final Forest Plan leaves off, and creates a framework for implementation that is largely consistent with the Forest Plan and provides the Forest Service with the tools necessary to achieve the Plan's objectives.

### ***The Three Rivers Challenge***

The Three Rivers Challenge draws together wilderness advocates, snowmobile and ATV-riders, outfitters, economic boosters, and local loggers and mills. Members include the Yaak Valley Forest Council, Kootenai Ridge Riders ATV Club, Troy Snowmobile Club, Libby Snow-Kats, Linehan Outfitting, and Chapel Cedar Works. These diverse folks put differences aside and tried to find paths to move both the Forest Service and the community ahead.

Historically, debates over the Kootenai National Forest have been high-octane brawls, leaving resentment, anger, frustration and loss in the wreckage. But this new plan — supported by an unlikely mix of timber workers, ATV and snowmobile enthusiasts, and conservationists — aims to break the gridlock and end the trench warfare that has served no one. It would:

- Create jobs in the woods, by light-on-the-land logging that leaves the forest healthier and protects communities from wildfire.
- Preserve recreational access via routes for folks who enjoy snowmobiles and ATVs.
- Protect special areas, for example, protecting Roderick Mountain as a wilderness area.

Northwestern Montana is the most productive forest land in the Rockies, yet mill after mill has shut down over the last decade. Those mills supported families and small businesses. Likewise, local conservationists, who would like to protect special places, are frustrated, as no new wilderness areas have been created on the Kootenai since 1964. Meanwhile, Lincoln County has been “discovered,” and property values have rocketed. Some of the richest wildlife habitat is lost to subdivisions, and favorite hunting spots and fishing streams are blocked behind “no trespassing” signs. Yet amid all this turmoil, there is progress and hope.

The Three Rivers Challenge, in various forms, has worked tirelessly for over eight years to bring a common vision together. The group has engaged the local community at every turn, neighbor to neighbor, to bring this proposal forward.

The efforts of the Three Rivers Challenge are strongly supported by a wide array of folks, including statewide elected officials, regional and national conservationists, motorized recreation groups, local businesses, and mill owners and workers.

### ***The Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Project***

After years of extensive dialogue, a diverse group of conservationists, loggers, snowmobilers, outfitters, and local landowners crafted a pioneering vision for the upper Blackfoot Valley. Key working partners include The Wilderness Society, members of the Blackfoot Challenge, Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Clearwater Resource Council, local outfitters and ranchers, retired Forest Service officials, and the Montana Wilderness Association.

The Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Project uses a landscape-level focus to simultaneously restore and protect the integrity of the landscape, and stimulate and diversify the rural economies of communities located within it.

Residents within the Blackfoot and Seeley Swan valleys have a long history of working together. This “culture of cooperation” has created a climate where timber workers and ranchers can sit down with conservation organizations as well as state and federal agencies, to collectively figure out solutions that are appropriate for both the local residents and the integrity of the landscape they live in.

The Project includes three balanced components:

- A reliance on stewardship contracting to implement landscape stewardship planning, restoration and monitoring.
- Biomass utilization at Pyramid Mountain Lumber to provide an outlet for excess forest fuels.
- Wilderness designation within the Blackfoot and Clearwater watersheds while expanding important snowmobile trail linkages.

An economic analysis in 2008 shows the Project would provide a variety of direct benefits annually to local communities and businesses, including 35 to 52 new jobs, increased small business income, and at least \$1.19 million in new wages – while continuing long-term benefits to the region from healthier lands, cleaner water, better habitat, and continuing or improved recreation.

After extensive outreach across the region, this local effort has received a wide cross section of support from local governments, individuals, and organizations, including three county commissions, Seeley Lake Community Council, Backcountry Horsemen, Seeley Lake Rural Fire District, Ovando Snowmobile Club, and the Seeley Lake Driftrider Snowmobile Club.

### **The Wilderness Areas in the Bill**

The Montana Wilderness Association strongly supports S.1470.

Montana’s most pristine places are where we go to hike, ski, hunt, fish, and picnic. These lands hold our families together and are the roots for our most lasting friendships. Protecting these unique places for future generations is part of our shared values, both as a state and as a nation. Our bounty of wild public lands anchors our past, present, and future. Montana historian, K. Ross Toole, noted that in Montana “wilderness is never far from the window pane.” Wilderness designation represents our commitment to these values.

S.1470 designates some of Montana’s finest wild places as wilderness, from the lush and moist Yaak Valley in northwestern Montana, to the arid, wide-open sagebrush country in southwestern Montana. Attached is a review of those wilderness areas and many of the other special designations that are contained in the bill, which are the products of the collaborative efforts described above. MWA does have concerns with a few of the changes and additions that have been made by Senator Tester in crafting S. 1470 (noted in the attached narrative), but recognizes that the extensive in-state outreach by Senator Tester is itself part of the collaborative process.

MWA supports this important legislation, and thanks Senator Tester and his staff for their hard work.

## **What can we do to encourage people to work together?**

Collaboration can be very rewarding, especially as old adversaries begin to build trust and trade social and political differences for a common vision around thorny issues that have paralyzed progress by our federal government for many years.

However, collaboration is also an incredibly delicate adventure. The pressures to abandon the course and return to the fold are intense. It can split whole communities, friends, even families. When MWA first announced the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership to the public, our funding suffered. The day after the announcement, my Inbox was filled with angry emails. Although we're now well past both of those events, they serve as a reminder that this path we've taken is fraught with difficulty and risk.

The one upside to this negativity is that it doesn't discriminate, everyone involved feels it. A few weeks after the announcement, I had lunch with Sherm Anderson, of Sun Mountain Lumber. He asked me what the response was within the conservation community. I replied, "They all tell me that you'll get logs and we'll never get any wilderness." Sherm smiled and said, "My guys tell me that you'll get wilderness and we'll never see a log." I think at that moment we both realized just how hard this would be.

Our behavior is shaped by many factors, not the least of which is reward, which can take many forms. The reward can be something tangible, like a restored watershed or a new wilderness area. Or, it can be intangible, like new friendships or a stronger sense of common purpose or vision. Some will respond only to the tangible and not see value in the intangible. Some will respond to both and others won't care about either.

If we truly want collaboration, then all of us who see value in it need to work for it. That includes the Forest Service, the Administration, and Congress. Too often over the last several years it has felt like the homage to collaboration by government is more grounded in talk than in action. It has felt like the path to collaboration is blocked by acquiescence to those too entrenched in ideology to see value in collaborating.

You have before you a group of individuals who have worked tirelessly in pursuit of a new vision, a vision that has been repeatedly endorsed by the new Administration, the Forest Service, and Congress. Many of those people are in the hearing room. For many of them, failure is simply not an option. There is no other place to go.

There is a lot of talk in Washington these days about transcending partisanship to find a common purpose. In our little corner of the world we have done exactly what the folks in Washington say they want. We've brought people together to find workable solutions to big problems. We've done a lot of hard work and, with your help, we're willing to do more.

If you want collaboration like this, your path can start here.

## **Conclusion**

Just as important as the details of these collaborations, or S.1470, are the positive working relationships and friendships that have developed between many Montanans who previously were at odds with one another. This is a real Montana success story.

It's the story of the backcountry horseman who wants to ride the traditional pack and saddle trails of Monture Creek in solitude.

It's the story of the mill worker in Deer Lodge who wants to earn a decent wage and live in a prosperous community with a good quality of life.

It's the story of the angler on the Big Hole River who wants to catch trout from a healthy native population.

It's the story of the snowmobiler in Troy who wants to ride in places that will still be there for her kids.

This is a story of Montanans rolling up their sleeves and challenging each other to understand the other's perspective. It's about building trust, and putting faith in the best part of ourselves. No single interest will ever get everything it wants, but by working together we can collectively get more done for the benefit of all.

The last time Congress designated new wilderness in Montana we used IBM typewriters and rotary phones, the big store was Kmart, and nobody had ever heard of anything called climate change. Montana has changed and is changing, and unless we come together to act we may all lose the Montana we know and love.

Polling shows very strong public support in Montana for S. 1470. This isn't surprising. After all, most of us live here for the same reasons.

We all get shivers when we hear an elk bugle. We all smile in wonder when we watch a Charlie Russell sunset paint the sky. And we all have a favorite small Montana town, even if we don't live there.

As Montanans, we all love the land, even if we want to use it in different ways. And we all know that the way forward is together, not apart.

S. 1470 is all about bringing us together.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony to support S. 1470.

Sincerely,

Tim Baker  
Legislative Campaign Director  
Montana Wilderness Association