

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

Attachment to Testimony of Tim Baker in Support of S. 1470

Overview of Wilderness and Other Special Designations Contained in S. 1470

Forest Service

Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest

Stony Mountain (14,261 acres)

This area includes key mountain goat ranges, wolverine natal denning habitat, and excellent elk country with large and healthy herds, as well as habitat for goshawk, pine marten, moose, black bear, lion, and gray wolf. Tributary streams sustain the blue-ribbon trout waters of Rock Creek. As a result of discussions with area snowmobilers, boundary adjustments were made to accommodate snowmobile use. The proposed boundaries generally match the Stony Mountain recommended wilderness on the Lolo National Forest.

Quigg Peak (Slide Rock) (8,388 acres)

As an integral part of the Rock Creek country, this area conserves key habitat for goshawk, pine marten, fisher, bobcat, cougar, and black bear, and protects vital headwaters for the blue-ribbon trout waters of Rock Creek. As a result of discussions with area snowmobilers, numerous boundary adjustments were made in several areas of the region to accommodate snowmobile use. As part of these discussions, Quigg Peak is included as wilderness. The boundaries are on the east slope of a recommended wilderness on the Lolo National Forest.

Ross Fork (Sapphires) (53,327 acres)

The proposal includes the Upper Ross Fork, and lands adjoining the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. Under current law, the entire Sapphires Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is to be managed “so as to maintain the presently-existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.” (Public Law 95-150). The baseline for this determination is 1977. The other half of the Sapphires WSA, to the west on the Bitterroot National Forest, is not addressed by this legislation, and remains in WSA status.

The Ross Fork-Sapphires area includes a fine system of primitive nonmotorized and wilderness portal trails; habitat for bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and wolverine; and excellent elk habitat and traditional backcountry hunting. Two Research Natural Areas (RNA) and various Salish cultural and religious sites are at the head of the Ross Fork. As a result of discussions with area snowmobilers, boundary adjustments were made to accommodate snowmobile use.

In S. 1470, and at the request of area mountain bikers, Senator Tester has moved the western wilderness boundary back from Trail 313, creating a corridor between the wilderness on the east

(Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF) and the remaining WSA on the west (Bitterroot NF). Recent field studies by the University of Montana show little or no mountain bike use on this trail.

Additions to Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness (56,680 acres)

These spectacular areas include several miles of the Continental Divide with numerous mountain lakes, magnificent peaks over 10,000 feet, one RNA, pure stands of subalpine larch, clear, cold trout and grayling waters feeding the Big Hole River, and wilderness portal trails. The proposal includes excellent habitat for mountain goat, bighorn sheep, elk (summer and fall), moose, marten, and wolverine denning, as well as elk calving areas. Cutthroat trout streams and lakes add to outstanding opportunities for wilderness hunting, hiking, horse packing, climbing, skiing, and primitive recreation. The boundaries include adjustments to exclude popular snowmobiling areas, while still protecting high lake basins and key mountain goat habitat.

Dolus Lakes (9,367 acres)

The majestic Flints rise more than a mile above the Clark Fork River. As a result of discussions with area snowmobilers, numerous boundary adjustments were made in several areas of the region to accommodate snowmobile use. As part of these discussions, Dolus Lakes is included as wilderness, and a companion area in the West Flints has been dropped.

West Big Hole (two units, 44,084 acres total)

Framing the sunset side of the fabled Big Hole River Valley, the snow-clad 10,000-foot-plus peaks of the Beaverhead Mountains tower over rugged glacial cirques, mountain lakes, and a dozen willow-lined tributaries of the Upper Big Hole River. The area includes excellent habitat for mountain goat, moose, wolverine, black bear, marten, and elk. Thirty miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail traverse the high country.

The Partnership strategy proposed a contiguous 92,800 acres of wilderness. In S. 1470, and to address concerns raised by motorized users, mountain bikers, and the Beaverhead County Commissioners, Senator Tester has cut the wilderness acreage by approximately 50,000 acres, and created north and south wilderness units, surrounded by a West Big Hole National Recreation Area. MWA does not support this change, and continues to believe that the wild values of the area should be protected by wilderness designation.

West Pioneers (two units, 25,742 acres total)

The proposed areas include two lake basins (Grouse Lakes and Bobcat Lakes), numerous streams, core mountain goat winter ranges, wolverine denning habitat, moose habitat, and legendary elk habitat, including calving areas, wallows, and traditional fall backcountry hunting areas. Excellent backcountry fishing exists in high country lakes.

In 1977, the West Pioneers Wilderness Study Area was designated by Congress as part of the Montana Wilderness Study Act. Under current law, the entire area is to be managed “so as to maintain the presently-existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.” (Public Law 95-150). The baseline for this determination is 1977.

The original Partnership strategy contained 34,400 acres of wilderness, out of approximately

150,000 acres contained in the West Pioneers WSA, and did not include any release from WSA status. In response to concerns raised by motorized users and the Beaverhead County Commissioners, over 8,000 acres of wilderness were cut from this proposal, the wilderness was bifurcated into two discrete units, those areas were surrounded with a West Pioneers Recreation Area, and the entire area was released from WSA status. MWA does not support these changes. MWA does support many of the restrictions contained in the Recreation Area, especially those related to further development of the area, and also supports allowing mountain bike use in much of the Recreation Area. However, MWA strongly opposes the level of snowmobiling and motorized activity now occurring in the area and does not believe that it represents a proper baseline for allowing future motorized activity (baseline should be 1977). MWA also believes the original proposal contained a more appropriate balance of wilderness for the area.

East Pioneers (Torrey Mountain) (76,775 acres)

Steep, rugged, and strikingly beautiful, this area includes massive granite walls and 11,000-foot-plus peaks, which are among the highest in Montana. This area includes 30 mountain lakes, superb fishing and elk hunting, and an excellent system of backcountry trails.

The original Partnership strategy contained over 88,000 acres of wilderness. In response to requests from the Montana Mining Association, motorized users, and the Beaverhead County Commissioners, in S. 1470 Senator Tester dropped approximately 14,000 acres from the north end, and cherry-stemmed a motorized trail to Tendoy Lake. MWA does not support either of these changes, especially the deletion of Black Lion Lake on the north end of the area.

Italian Peaks (29,508 acres)

The Italian Peaks area lies in the remote and arid extreme southwestern corner of the state, and much of the area is blanketed in high-elevation grassland with occasional islands of forest on cooler, north-facing slopes. As such, it is an elk hunter's paradise, and hunting is the dominant use of the area. Wildlife moving out of Yellowstone Park and the Centennial Valley use the Italian Peaks and nearby Lima Peaks area.

Lima Peaks (35,120 acres)

Here, the Continental Divide twists upward from high parks, sagebrush-grasslands, and aspen groves. Together with Italian Peaks, 40 stunning miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail would be protected, as well as fossils, archeological sites, and excellent habitat for mountain goats, elk, wolverine, and antelope. The area also includes the Middle Fork of Little Sheep Creek, home to a population of native cutthroat. The Lima Peaks area is well known for its excellent elk hunting opportunities and exceptional backcountry scenery.

Electric Peak (4,653 acres)

This protects an area known for its rich wildlife habitat (elk, black bear, wolverine, and mountain lion) and high nonmotorized recreational values. This proposal complements a proposed wilderness on the Helena National Forest.

The boundaries reflect an agreement with the Deerlodge Snowmobile Club to protect popular snowmobile play areas to the east of Cliff Mountain while ensuring quiet winter recreation in the Cottonwood Lake area. The proposal was also revised to reflect a new collaborative effort with

local mountain bikers, backcountry horsemen, the Continental Divide Trail Alliance, and other outdoor groups, built around a common vision for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. As part of that agreement, boundary adjustments were made on the south and west, to protect high quality wild country while still providing nonmotorized trail opportunities for mountain bikers. In addition, and as part of this collaborative, a new Thunderbolt Creek Recreation Area has been included (22,037 acres), with an emphasis on opportunities for mountain biking.

Highlands (20,392 acres)

These towering, 10,000-foot-plus peaks on the Continental Divide provide a stunning backdrop to Butte. Mountain goat and bighorn sheep roam the rugged divide as well as elk, moose, and deer. The Highlands area provides excellent opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

In S. 1470, at the request of the City of Butte and PEAK, Senator Tester provided allowances for access to a municipal water supply and transmission tower, and for limited military landings for military training. MWA supports these provisions.

Lost Cabin Lake (5,220 acres)

This small but highly scenic area in the rugged Tobacco Roots is a primitive nonmotorized area with two stunning lake basins, fine trails, mountain goat habitat, and excellent wilderness attributes.

Snowcrest Range (89,798 acres)

Magnificent mountain peaks stretching from Snowcrest Mountain south to Sawtooth Mountain and Antone Peak tower above expansive meadows bordered by aspen groves, stunted conifers, and sagebrush. The diversity of habitats provides excellent homes for black bear, golden eagle, mountain lion, mule deer, antelope, and elk. This is a sportsman's paradise, with superb hunting and good trout fishing. As headwaters of the Ruby River, the Snowcrest Range supplies cold, clean water for irrigation and trout fisheries downstream.

In S. 1470, at the request of the Snowcrest Grazing Association, Senator Tester included language to allow continued motorized access for ranchers to water infrastructure and for trailing sheep. MWA does not support this language: it is unnecessary because these activities are already protected under the Wilderness Act and Congressional grazing guidelines.

Cowboy's Heaven/Lee Metcalf Wilderness Additions (18,950 acres)

Cowboy's Heaven sits between Beartrap Canyon and the Spanish Peaks unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness. A mix of open grassland parks and forests, this area is a wildlife haven, home to elk, black bear, moose, mountain lion, and wolverine. Hunting, horseback riding, camping, fishing, and hiking are all popular in this area. Several other small additions to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness serve to strengthen the integrity of this important anchor for wildlife and fisheries.

In S. 1470, at the request of mountain bikers, Senator Tester removed Trail 315 from the wilderness, creating an open corridor through the area. Legal public access to "Old Indian Trail" #315 crosses one mile of private property posted as open only to foot and horse travel.

Mount Jefferson (4,465 acres)

The most distant tributary of the Missouri River, Hell-Roaring Creek, begins its 3,941-mile journey to the ocean in this U-shaped canyon wrapped by the Continental Divide. The mountain waters pour off the Divide to feed myriad lakes and springs in the neighboring Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Mt. Jefferson, an integral part of the Centennials wildlands complex, is excellent grizzly, moose, and elk habitat. The BLM has recommended wilderness for roadless lands adjoining Mt. Jefferson on the west. The primary traditional uses include hunting, hiking, fishing, and horseback travel.

Lost Creek Protection Area (15,134 acres)

In response to interest from area mountain bikers in Anaconda and Butte, this area is included, to be managed by the Forest Service for the benefit of mountain biking.

Lolo National Forest

Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Additions (78,977 acres)

(includes North Fork Blackfoot—Monture, 71,378 acres, and Grizzly Basin, 7,599 acres)

Monture-North Fork Blackfoot is the source of pristine tributaries of the Blackfoot River that flow from a series of rugged mountain basins bordering the Bob Marshall-Scapegoat Wilderness. The area is dotted with waterfalls, streams and glacial lakes. Mountain goats traverse sheer limestone cliffs. Monture Creek is a majestic 12-mile-long valley. Grizzly Basin is remote and rugged. The entire area provides unsurpassed elk, mule deer, lynx and bear habitats.

Pack strings, wranglers, hikers and hunters traverse the Monture Creek area. Area trails through mountain passes connect with the pack trails of “the Bob.” It remains a favorite of Montana families, whether on foot or horseback.

Mission Mountains Wilderness Addition (4,501 acres)

The Upper West Fork of the Clearwater River is the largest roadless watershed bordering the Mission Mountains Wilderness. It provides great wilderness hunting for elk and mule deer as well as rare old-growth forest habitats for lynx, fisher, wolverine, pine marten and grizzly. This addition was part of a 2001 winter recreation agreement with Seeley Lake Snowmobilers.

Otatsy Recreation Area (1,271 acres)

In S. 1470, Senator Tester included the Otatsy Recreation Area, adjacent to the wilderness proposed for the North Fork Blackfoot—Monture area described above, to be primarily managed for the benefit of snowmobiling. MWA supports this designation.

Kootenai National Forest

Roderick Wilderness (29,869 acres)

This area provides vital lower-elevation forested habitat for moose, elk, whitetail deer, lynx, pine marten, wolverine, grizzly, and a host of deep-woods bird species. Clear cold streams provide sanctuary for native cutthroat and rainbow trout.

Three Rivers Special Management Area (74,274 acres)

This area includes a number of different units intended to enhance recreational uses in the region. Specific designations include two snowmobile areas, including the Northwest Peaks and Mount Henry Snowmobile Areas, and several areas for non-motorized recreation, including the Northwest Peaks, Murphy Mountain, Mount Henry, and Roderick Mountain Backcountry Areas. Also included is an all-terrain vehicle study, to review opportunities for ATV routes on the Three Rivers Ranger District.

Bureau of Land Management

In S.1470, at the request of the Madison and Beaverhead County Commissioners and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Senator Tester addressed ten BLM Wilderness Study Areas in southwestern Montana. The bill designates portions of five areas as wilderness, releases five areas in their entirety, and releases portions of five areas, consistent with existing BLM recommendations. Generally, MWA supports this approach, with two exceptions: the East Fork Blacktail Wilderness Study Area should be reconsidered for wilderness or some other protective designation, and the Price Creek/Pete Creek area in the Centennial Mountains should be reconsidered and added to the wilderness proposed for the area.

Butte Field Office

Humbug Spires (8,892 acres)

The Humbug Spires, first designated by the BLM as a primitive area in the 1970s, is well known for its unique and spectacular rock formations (the Humbug Spires Formation), and is a popular destination for hunting, fishing, hiking and rock climbing. Moose Creek, which flows from the area, is a perennial stream and coldwater fishery.

The Humbug Spires Wilderness Study Area currently includes 11,175 acres. S. 1470 releases approximately 2,283 acres.

Dillon Field Office

Blacktail Mountains (10,667 acres)

The Blacktail Mountains provide many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The major attractions are backpacking, camping and big game hunting, and the area boasts a healthy population of elk. Opportunities for day hiking, horseback riding, sightseeing, nature study and rock hounding are also excellent. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing opportunities are good.

The Blacktail Mountains Wilderness Study Area currently includes 17,479 acres. S. 1470 releases approximately 6,812 acres.

Centennial Mountains (23,256 acres)

The Centennial Mountains straddle a 30-mile segment of the Continental Divide that overlooks the Centennial Valley to the north and the Snake River plain to the south. There are outstanding opportunities for solitude, and hiking, camping and horseback riding are prevalent throughout the

area. Hunting for elk, deer, moose and black bear are popular fall activities; extensive wildflower displays attract visitors in the spring. The Centennials offer good opportunities for wildlife observation and photography of elk, mule deer, bear, moose, eagles, falcons and hawks. The steep faces and ridges of the Centennial Mountains provide challenging climbing opportunities. Fishing is popular. Westslope and Yellowstone cutthroat trout, as well as rainbow, brown and brook trout inhabit the area's waterways.

Two threatened and endangered species occupy the area. Grizzly bears have been sighted in the Centennials, and the area contains important grizzly bear habitat. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles inhabit the study area and are commonly seen.

The Centennial Mountains Wilderness Study Area contains 27,691 acres managed by the BLM. S. 1470 releases approximately 4,637 acres.

Ruby Mountains (15,504 acres)

The Ruby Mountains afford outstanding opportunities for solitude. Big game hunting is the primary recreational use, with exceptional hunting for elk and mule deer. The opportunities for diverse types of recreation are excellent. Winter recreation includes hiking in the lower elevations and skiing and snowshoeing in the high country.

The Ruby Mountains Wilderness Study Area contains 26,611 acres managed by the BLM. S. 1470 releases approximately 10,966 acres.

Farlin Creek (661 acres)

The Farlin Creek area is contiguous to the 76,775-acre proposed Forest Service East Pioneer wilderness (above). A transfer of management authority from the BLM to the Forest Service is recommended so only one agency is responsible for management.

Farlin Creek, in and of itself, does not have outstanding primitive recreation values, but when considered with the East Pioneers area, it provides good opportunities for primitive recreation. Activities such as hiking, backpacking, horseback riding and hunting for elk, deer and mountain grouse are available. As an access point or supplemental site, the area contributes other opportunities on national forest lands, such as climbing, nature study and mountain goat hunting.

The Farlin Creek Wilderness Study Area includes 1,139 acres of BLM land. S. 1470 releases approximately 529 acres.