

Why Conservationists Support Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act

- Permanently protects nearly 700,000 acres of spectacular backcountry throughout western Montana as wilderness. This includes some 25 spectacular places conservationists have fought hard to preserve for decades.
- Meanwhile, the bill steers logging to areas that are already roaded to reduce fire risk near communities.
- Allocates funds to improve fisheries, water quality, and wildlife habitat.
- Areas released from wilderness management will largely retain their wild character.
- Legislation is consistent with all environmental laws including NEPA, ESA, habitat protections for grizzly bears, and the national roadless policies and directives.

More Details:

What areas are protected as wilderness? Tester's Jobs and Recreation Act will protect 670,000 acres as new wilderness on three national forests and adjacent BLM lands. These include the headwaters of Rock Creek, the Italian Peaks, the Snowcrest Range and Pioneers, reaches of the Monture Creek watershed, the rugged Grizzly Basin adjacent to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, and Roderick Mountain up the Yaak. These are magnificent places conservationists have fought hard to protect for decades.

What happens to the current wilderness study areas (WSAs)? Undesignated WSA lands would continue to be managed according to the existing land use plans in place, which in most cases would preserve their wild character.

Why are some WSA's being released? It's been standard practice for decades that wilderness legislation designates some areas as wilderness and release other areas from interim wilderness management, while allowing for them to be re-considered in the future.

Why not just keep everything de-facto wilderness? Congress designated seven Wilderness Study Areas in Montana's national forests more than 30 years ago. This status is a temporary reprieve from road building, mining, logging, and oil and gas extraction, but not from motorized use. Unfortunately, motorized use becomes more entrenched every year. Designating these WSAs now as wilderness areas will bring lasting protection by permanently barring any development and machines from nearly 700,000 acres.

Where will logging occur? The legislation steers logging towards areas that are roaded and identified as suitable for harvest by the Forest Service, and where insect infestations increase fire hazards near towns. Inventoried roadless lands in the backcountry are still afforded protection by a roadless directive recently issued by the current administration.

What about our fundamental environmental laws? Nothing in this bill changes national environmental laws including NEPA, ESA or the multi-agency grizzly bear habitat standards.

Where would restoration money come from? Stewardship contracts would create jobs aimed at repairing Montana's damaged streams and wildlife habitat while federal funding would

augment the sweep of this restoration work. For example, utilizing federal funds on the Blackfoot-Clearwater portion of this bill is expected to create roughly 50 new restoration jobs.

Who supports the Tester bill? Mainstream conservation groups including the Wilderness Society, Montana Wilderness Association, Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, Montana Wildlife Federation, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Campaign for America's Wilderness, former Congressman Pat Williams, Montana rod-and-gun clubs and many others.

Who gets to weigh in? Everyone. NOW is the time to have your voice heard. Download the bill at Senator Tester's website.

Is this the end of the wilderness debate in Montana? No. Conservationists continue to work hard to protect special places like the Rocky Mountain Front, Whitefish Divide, Great Burn and Scotchman Peaks. Success today will build more success tomorrow.