

Land and Creation in Montana: A Faithful Reflection and a Look to the Future



Background

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse
~Romans 1:20*

Public lands and wilderness have played a strong and influential role in defining Montana as a state as well as defining its people and communities. Last year, Senator Tester introduced the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act which would define the specific use of more than two million acres of Montana forest land. The various components would result in new recreation designations for specific areas of the state, mandated timber harvesting in certain National Forests and new wilderness designations.

This legislation would designate the first wilderness in Montana in more than 25 years while also designating specific areas for timber harvesting which will support local and rural economies in Montana for years to come.

New Recreation Opportunities

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act would designate various lands in the southwestern part of Montana for recreation, management and special protection. While the various uses on/in each area are slightly different, generally timber harvesting, grazing, oil and gas development, and vehicles are not permitted. However, snowmobiles are permitted in most areas but only in designated places. Hunting and fishing are permitted as is the case in most wilderness and recreation areas around the country.



The recreation areas established would include:

- West Bighole – 94,237 acres in Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
- West Pioneers – 129,252 acres in Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
- Thunderbolt Creek - 22,037 acres in Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
- Otatsy – 1,271 acres in Lolo National Forest (grazing)

Special management areas have also been designated to identify specific place based needs.

Timber Harvesting

The proposed bill would mandate timber cutting in the Kootenai and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests, and potentially part of the Lolo National forests in the western part of Montana. Mandated cuts would be in place each year for the period of 14 years. Maximum cut levels are (70,000 acres for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge and 30,000 acres for the Kootenai) and minimum annual leases are established.

Wilderness Designation

Within the bill, more than 670,000 acres of National Forest Service land is designated as wilderness in line with already existing wilderness designations and ecosystem needs. The places protected through wilderness designation are intended to provide permanent protection for unique and irreplaceable parts of God's creation that future generations should know and love the way communities do today.



Faithful Reflection

From the beginning, the Bible encourages us as children of God to live in right relationships with our neighbors as well as with creation. From the story of Noah to Jesus' time in the wilderness the diverse roles that Creation can take in our lives are apparent.

Living sustainably with and on God's land is our responsibility as Christians. This means taking only that which we need in a manner that will allow the Earth and to remain healthy and whole while also providing for our families and communities. At the same time, it requires us to recognize those places and spaces in God's creation that are most vulnerable to disturbance and irreplaceable if lost or damaged.

Community Value

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (which we neither endorse nor oppose) provides a framework for conversation about how to best achieve this balance that we are called to as people of faith. It provides ways for us to live off and with the land while recognizing those areas that should be left untouched and protected for future generations.

Montana has long been defined by its beautiful landscapes, big skies and flowing rivers. It is only appropriate that we, as Montanans and Christians, reflect on our faithful teachings which include caring for future generations and God's creation.