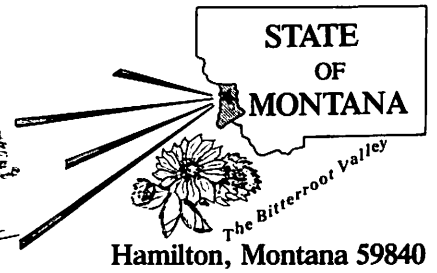
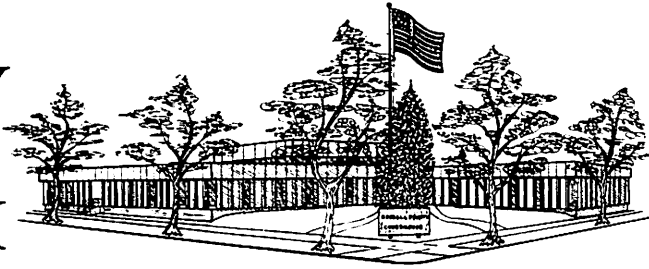


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



September 15, 2017

Senator Steve Daines
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Daines,

Ravalli County strongly supports legislation to finally address WSAs (Wilderness Study Areas). Ravalli County has been asking Congress and the Department of Agriculture to address this critical land use issue for years. The WSAs in Ravalli County have been studied by the Forest Service and we agree with, and support, their 1987 recommendation to release the Sapphire WSA. The Blue Joint WSA is 64,168 acres with 27,501 acres recommended for Wilderness in the 1987 Bitterroot Forest Plan (BFP). The Commission strongly opposes Wilderness designation of any of the Blue Joint WSA.

The Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) currently has 750,211 acres designated as Wilderness Area and two (2) Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) with a combined acreage of 101,974 acres. Additionally, there are 48,864 acres designated as Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWA). A number of the fractured Bitterroot RWA acres are adjacent

to private property and the Wildland-Urban Interface with the remainder attached to, and expanding, designated Wilderness Areas and, in the opinion of the Commissioners, do not possess significant wilderness characteristics. We believe that there are NO public lands, which are not currently designated as Wilderness Area, that have STRONG LOCAL SUPPORT for designation as Wilderness Area in Ravalli County. The overwhelming majority of Ravalli County citizens involved with agriculture, timber, mining, communication, motorized recreation and general outdoor recreation that live, work and recreate in our county support a reduction of public lands managed as Wilderness Area and increasing public lands managed for multiple-use.

When reviewing lands within Ravalli County being studied/considered for Wilderness Area designation, of paramount importance to our residents are the Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The analysis performed by the Bitterroot National Forest in 1987 found 74,473 acres of the 101,974 acres of WSA was "Not Recommended for Wilderness." These areas are still Wilderness Study Areas, not because they have outstanding wilderness characteristics, but because Congress has not acted to remove the WSA designation it imposed 40 years ago.

As the budget problems persist in Washington, D.C., Ravalli County Commissioners would like to stress the importance of federal revenue sharing that comes from the active management of federal lands. Recognizing and utilizing the economic potential of responsible resource utilization on public lands would greatly benefit our nation beginning with our local economy, extending to the many visitors who travel to Ravalli

County to recreate on these public lands and support federal agencies' budgets from permits, income, and fees.

Ravalli County is surrounded by millions of acres of Wilderness Area and National Parks that are located within a day's drive. These Wilderness Areas are, in many cases, the origin of catastrophic forest fires that burn tens of thousands of acres of National Forest, State Forest and private property every year. The Ravalli County Commissioners strongly support and encourage federal policy reform that requires active forest management rather than the current model that results in catastrophic fires, loss of life and property, economic impacts, loss of wildlife habitat and significant impacts to our citizen's health and safety from hazardous air quality. The Commissioners also strongly encourage Congress to release all WSAs and RWAs in Ravalli County from a Wilderness Area designation.

Sincerely,



Greg Chilcott, Chairman




Jeff Burrows, Member



Ray Hawk, Member

ABSENT

Doug Schallenberger, Member



Chris Hoffman, Member