

## Glenda Wiles

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**From:** C. Grandstaff <grandstaff@cybernet1.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 1, 2018 2:59 PM  
**To:** Glenda Wiles  
**Subject:** letter for public correspondence

Hey Glenda,

Would you add this letter to the public record in advance of the Feb. 7, 10 a.m. rehearing on the WSA release issue?

Thanks!

C.

No one is making any more wilderness but our county commissioners must think wilderness is limitless and exploitable based on their recent letter to Sen. Steve Daines.

Commissioners voted unanimously (Commissioner Doug Schallenberger was absent) to send a letter to Daines supporting his legislative efforts to remove all Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) and Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWA) in Ravalli County from potential permanent wilderness designation.

We don't know who wrote the letter, when or why. Though the Sept. 15 meeting to discuss sending the letter was open to the public, the letter itself had already been written by person or persons unknown and the public meeting was merely an opportunity for the commission to tweak it. Considering that the commissioners were speaking for all of Ravalli County, we would have liked an opportunity to provide substantive public comment and not just minor editing. We take issue with several assertions in the letter, including: "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." How would county commissioners know that unless they surveyed the public and took meaningful public comment? In fact, only three people submitted public comments, and all opposed sending the letter.

It's also most disheartening that the commission would write a letter of support to a U.S. senator who lied and insulted his constituents in a cynical display of political pandering, and who deliberately pitted Montanans against Montanans, by blaming "environmental extremists" for this season's fires without providing any facts, not even alternative ones.

Perhaps there are reasons to release these undesignated wild lands, but since the public had no input into this letter, we can only speculate what these reasons might be. Maybe the commission was thinking that releasing these lands would provide jobs. They insinuate as much when they state: "Recognizing and utilizing the economic potential of responsible resource utilization would greatly benefit our nation beginning with our local economy . . ."

What they don't say, or even appear to appreciate, is that wilderness has an intrinsic value, and does not exist solely for the money value of its timber or its minerals or for its grazing or fee-generating potential. Public lands belong to the American people; they don't exist for private profit.

If their letter is all about spurring the local economy, the commissioners are behind the times. The local

economy has done nothing but steadily improve over the past 40 years. It's also changed considerably and for the better. Recreation, health care and science is our economy now, not logging or mining. The future - indeed, the present - of the economy lies in this magnificent environment and its protection. No one moves to the Bitterroot for a logging or mining job.

If the job-creation speculation is correct, then our local and national representatives appear to be trying to open up public lands for private fossil fuel gain at a time when Colstrip is preparing to shut down by 2027. Solar power has increased fourfold in Montana in the past year, and solar jobs have surpassed jobs in other, more traditional energy sectors. And that's not fake news, just inconvenient facts.

If the commission wants to spur economic development, there are better areas on which to focus. They might want to start by recognizing not only the existing recreation jobs that already exist here, but by acknowledging the trend towards clean energy jobs and promote those.

Submitted by Carlotta Grandstaff on behalf of Bitterrooters for Planning