

Glenda Wiles

From: Marilyn Wolff <wolffmarilyn@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, February 3, 2018 7:22 AM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: Sapphires and Blue Joint WSAs and Your Support of Daines' SB 2206
Attachments: Bitterroot Star Opinion Letter Jan 2018.docx

Gentlemen,

I am a Ravalli County resident and live in Stevensville. I was shocked to hear you sent a letter of support to Daines for the release of the Sapphires and Blue Joint WSAs which total 160,000 acres. It appears you did not call for a public hearing, public survey, or announce your position for the public to weigh before your letter was sent. You represent over 40,000 residents in Ravalli County and have an obligation to allow for a public conversation before any action like this. Let me remind you that you have jurisdiction over Ravalli County property not the WSAs which are public lands (for all Americans) but your letter suggests you know best without any other input.

I recently wrote a guest column article in the Bitterroot Star addressing the reasons to preserve the WSAs and I have attached it. I plan on attending the special meeting you agreed to on 2/7/18 where you can shed some light on this issue. In my opinion you listened to special interest groups who will degrade these special lands and ignored your responsibility to the public. There are many more groups that should have been involved like hunters, fishermen, backcountry horsemen, hikers, etc. I request you write a letter to Daines rescinding your previous decision.

Marilyn Wolff
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January 12, 2018

Editor

Bitterroot Star

115W 3rd St #108

Stevensville MT 59870

RE: Opinion Letter on Daines' Senate Bill 2206 – A Case for Montana Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs)

Dear Editor:

January 10, 2018 brought out the special interest opinion pieces in your paper claiming the release of five WSAs is good for Montanans to "enjoy these lands". Who are these special interests? They were the Montana Mining Association (let's have more taxpayer funded mining reclamations when the mines go bust), the Montana Snowmobile Association (they can't get into enough protected areas where wildlife can have some winter peace and quiet), the Montana Farm Bureau Federation (more grazing land at a bargain, my guess), Ravalli County Off Road User Association, and several partisan county commissions including Ravalli's. There was absolutely NO PUBLIC comment periods or meetings to discuss this proposed bill. Not surprising since Mr. Daines dodges public meetings with his constituents; he prefers teleconferences with pre-selected questions. So Steve moves his bill ahead with special interests support to usurp almost 500,000 acres of specially protected public land. Daines' bill isn't really about public recreation which already is allowed but degradation of these pristine areas that Stevensville-born Senator Lee Metcalf identified in the 1970s.

A recent poll by the Bozeman Chronicle asked for opinions on Daines' bill. Respondents were 69% opposed to it. Steve, born in Van Nuys, California, likes to boast he's a fifth generation Montanan but I question his Montana values. In my opinion Senate Bill 2206, falsely named The Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act is stealth theft of high value public lands. Here's why we should question this bill:

1. The Bitterroot National Forest Plan May 2016 "designates 2,246 miles of road and trails open to motorized use, nearly the driving distance between Hamilton and New York City. The plan also permits motorized over-snow use (snowmobiles) on 543,840 acres, one third of the National Forest." The forest website posts this information. There is plenty of snowmobiling and ATV use without adding two WSAs.
2. Introduce biking and ATVs in lands managed for wilderness values you can expect noxious weed introduction on their knobby tires, trail erosion, unauthorized trails, wildlife negatively affected, and trail conflicts between users. Hikers, horses, bikes and ATVs are a challenging mix. Add in cows if grazing is allowed.
3. Let me list the WSAs that will lose their designation and some of their values:
West Pioneers: 151,000 acres. Southwest Montana's last remaining roadless area. High peaks with tributaries running both to the Wise River and Big Hole River, both outstanding fisheries. Elk habitat is excellent.

Blue Joint: 32,500 acres with beautiful forests and meadows, whitebark pine at high elevations and wildlife is abundant.

Big Snowies: 91,000 acres. Lewistown is said to have the best water in the state from the Snowies and their resulting springs. Big Springs is said to have the purest water in the nation. Wilderness features are excellent. Lewistown takes great pride in this area.

Sapphires: 94,000 acres offer lush wildlands, 20 some lakes and the creeks run to the Bitterroot River and Rock Creek, again excellent fisheries.

Middle Fork Judith: 81,000 acres near Great Falls in the Little Belt Mountains. River canyons offer nearly 30 miles of streams full of native cutthroat and rainbow trout. Again there is great wildlife habitat.

There is a strong, fierce pride held by Montanans for our beautiful state which brought in 3.29 billion dollars from 12.2 million nonresident visitors in 2017, numbers courtesy of itrr.umt.edu. Tourists are coming to Big Sky Country for a reason and WSAs exemplify the values we want to protect. Over and over you hear "keep public lands in public hands". WSAs are truly special and a decision on their status should have been made by Congress long ago but partisan politics locked them into a limbo. These five WSAs should continue as is until there is extensive public input. Daines' bill, if passed, will be Montana's greatest historical loss of exceptional public land. Please call his office and let him know your opinion, 202-224-2651. Vote in 2018 and 2020 because we need local, state, and congressional candidates who will protect and value our public lands that bring in big tourism dollars and candidates that respect public opinion.

M. Wolff

Stevensville MT