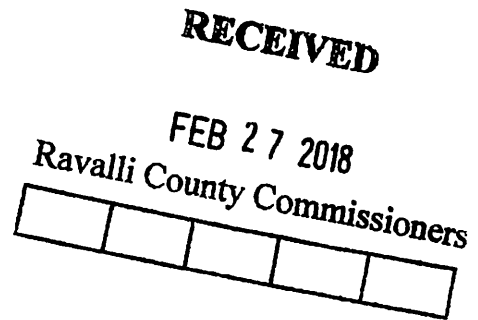


February 26, 2018

Ravalli County Commissioners
215 South 4th Suite H
Hamilton, MT 59840



Dear Mr. Chairman and Commission Members,

Re: Letter to Senator Daines - SB 2206

I am deeply disappointed and disturbed by your support of SB 2260. That bill will remove the special management provisions now in place that govern the national forest administration of the Sapphire, Blue Joint and two other Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in Montana.

These key high elevation, 6500 to 8500', roadless watersheds hold the snowpack that feeds the groundwater, river and streams, especially through the hot summer months. In those summer months, this water sustains the Bitterroot trout fishery as well as the critical late summer water for agriculture, recreation, domestic and commercial uses. It is the lifeblood of our valley.

And now without any public input or discussion, Senator Daines, his supporters in the extractive industries, the snowmobilers, off-road vehicle users, mountain bikers and the current Administration have put forth a measure that will certainly risk the integrity of those watersheds. Senator Daines has not been forthright and upfront with the citizens most impacted by his proposed legislation.

Under the Creative Act of 1897, which established the Forest Reserves, the first and foremost charge of the act was to protect the watersheds within the Reserves. From that directive comes the use and protection of other resources, but not to the detriment of the watershed and the water they generate. The Bitter Root and Sapphire Ranges encompass the Bitter Root Valley and are a complete watershed, a valuable asset that sustains the valley.

Science has told us the most productive and vital watersheds are in higher elevation roadless, wilderness areas. So to open these areas to logging, mining and off-road vehicle use is to risk the sustainability and integrity of those areas. (Please refer to the Columbia River Badin Ecosystem Management Study).

The Administration and the Republican Congress have deeply cut the Forest Service budget. Should our high elevation watersheds be opened to snowmobiles, mountain bikes and four-wheelers, or logging and mining, there is no funding available to insure protection or restoration of water resources.

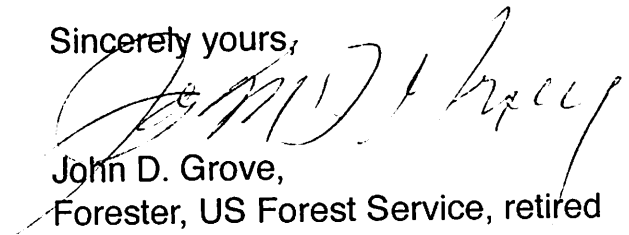
Perhaps it is time to re-study the Wilderness Study Areas and this time around include the effects of climate change, and increased populations which bring more demand for water. Has anybody noticed the wave of folks coming to the Bitterroot because it has clean air, good water and open space? Or because Missoula is becoming overcrowded, too much traffic and etc.?

It takes knowledge, vision and leadership to understand the need to sustain and protect the integrity of our watersheds. Were it not for the foresight, wisdom, knowledge and courage of some of our previous leaders, we would not be blessed with the public lands that produce the abundant water resources we have today.

Enclosed is an editorial from a past city commissioner from Lewistown concerning SB 2206. It is well written and exhibits an understanding and knowledge of the value of roadless watersheds.

I hope you will re-assess your support of SB 2206.

Sincerely yours,



John D. Grove,
Forester, US Forest Service, retired

CC: Congressman, Governor Bullock
The Bitterroot Star
Missoulian

WSA bill imperils too much

Like many Montanans, my wife and I have spent a great deal of time in the Big Snowies. We've taken our children and their friends hiking, camping and backpacking there.

And when we can no longer hike or snowshoe up there, we will take great pleasure knowing that our children and their children can have the same experience.



**DAVE
BYERLY**

The Big Snowies is one of five wilderness study areas that would lose their protection as a result of U.S. Sen. Steve Daines' bill, S. 2206. That bill would remove protection from nearly a half-million of our wildest, most pristine public lands.

I like Steve Daines, and I voted for him. But this WSA bill was a complete surprise and a real disappointment.

It was a surprise for two reasons.

First, Daines invited no public input into his proposal. I sit on the Lewistown City Commission. Our municipal water supply comes from the aquifer that comes from the Snowies. Water is the lifeblood of our community, and we have some of the best water in the world. And it's because of the Snowies.

I am really surprised Daines never visited with the people of Lewistown about this bill. If he had, he would have received a lot of input.

And one of the things he would have heard about was the overwhelming response of the community — liberal and conservative, Republican and Democrat — when an open-pit copper mine was being discussed and explored in the Snowies in the 1980s. No one was in favor of it; the WSA status was a factor in preventing it.

Second, we've had the Big Snowies WSA for more than 40 years. I am pretty plugged into the community, and there has been no public issue with the Snowies being managed as a wilderness, no public concerns expressed, no clamor about their WSA status.

It hasn't been a negative to our community, and it hasn't hurt our economy. In fact, you could argue that it has helped our local economy. It has been accepted and enjoyed like the untreated, pure water that comes out of our tap. It would appear that perhaps we've taken our water quality and the Big Snowies for granted.

I have no idea who Daines has been listening to, unless it's ATV and motorcycle owners who already can ride over most of the Little Belts and almost all of Fergus County. The WSA has been a non-issue locally, and his bill comes out of the blue.

The Snowies are vital to central Montana from both a quality-of-life and an economic development point of view. Hikers, hunters, anglers, horseback riders, campers, backpackers, photographers, skiers and snowshoers, families and people of all ages can use the Big Snowies WSA. This area, like all Montana WSAs, is not locked up. They are used and enjoyed.

I spend much of my time now working on economic development issues in Lewistown and central Montana, on trying to retain and bring in jobs. I have the great privilege of working on this with a wide variety of local folks with different political and philosophical opinions but with a shared belief in Lewistown's future. One thing we hear over and over is that our quality of life is one of our greatest assets from an economic development standpoint.

Our clean water, our environment, our recreational opportunities are all part of that quality of life, and the Snowies is a big part of all of those things. We increasingly understand the importance of the Snowies to the future of our area, and their importance will only grow.

Senator Daines is asking us to risk too much with his bill.

Please see ourlandourlegacy.org for more information.

Dave Byerly is the former publisher of the Lewistown News-Argus and a current Lewistown city commissioner. He stresses that his views are his own and do not necessarily represent those of the city commission or any other community group of which he is a member.