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SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES
EXHIBIT NO. 6
DATE 1/26/2005
BILL NO. ST10

USDA Forest Service
Northern Region
Date: December 25, 2005

Topic: Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 - Public Law 95-105

The Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977, Public Law 95-150, required the study of nine areas for their suitability for preservation as wilderness, with a report on to be submitted to the President within five years. The Act designated these areas as Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), and gave broad direction for their management:

Sec. 3. (a) Except as otherwise provided by this section, and subject to existing private rights, the wilderness study areas designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered...so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (P.L. 95-150).

Many of the areas had established jeep roads as well as snowmobile and motorcycle use in 1977. A subsequent House Report (H.R. Rep. No. 95-620 (1977), clarified congressional intent to allow established uses to continue: *"Nothing in S. 393 will prohibit the use of off-road vehicles, unless the normal Forest Service planning process ...determines off-road vehicle use to be inappropriate in a given area...It is the intention of the committee that the areas in S. 393 remain open to off-road vehicle use unless and until they are formally designated as wilderness."*

In 1983, Congress acted on two WSAs, Taylor-Hilgard and Mount Henry. Public Law 98-140 included portions of the Taylor-Hilgard WSA area in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, and removed the rest of the Taylor-Hilgard and the Mount Henry WSAs from further study or wilderness suitability protection.

The WSA areas currently managed under the Act are:

<u>WSA</u>	<u>Gross Acres</u>	<u>National Forest (s)</u>
West Pioneer	151,000	Bearverhead-Deerlodge (B-D)
Bluejoint	61,000	Bitterroot
Sapphire Mtns	94,000	Bitterroot and B-D
Ten Lakes	34,000	Kootenai
Middle Fork Judith	81,000	Lewis and Clark
Big Snowies	91,000	Lewis and Clark
Hyalite-Porcupine- Buffalo Horn	155,000	Gallatin

Of the seven WSAs, only a portion of the Bluejoint and the Ten Lakes were recommended by the Forest Service for eventual wilderness designation. Congress has not acted on any of the seven.

Current management of congressionally designated WSAs is consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977. These seven areas will continue to be managed under the direction in the 1977 legislation pending further Congressional action. Because the 1977 legislation allowed for some motorized recreation to continue in areas where it was already established, those uses may still be allowed in certain WSAs.

Should Congress repeal P.L 95-105, management of these areas would be guided by Forest Resource and Management Plan direction. Currently five National Forests in Montana are revising their Forest Plans, with the remaining four Forests scheduled to begin revision in 2006.