MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION | Helena Office P.O. Box 635, Helena, MT 59624 | 406-443-7350 fax: 406-443-0750 www.wildmontana.org

Senate Natural Resources Committee
House Joint Resolution 18
Testimony of Tim Baker, Executive Director
Montana Wilderness Association
March 9, 2005

SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES
EXHIBIT NO. 5
DATE 3/9/05
BILL NO. HJ 18

Chairman Roush, and members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Tim Baker, I am the Executive Director of the Montana Wilderness Association, and I appear before you today on behalf of the 6,000 members of MWA. Thank you for this opportunity.

In the House, we opposed HJ 18. However, as amended, and as long as the current amendments stay as they are now, we're no longer opposed. Should these amendments be altered or stricken, we oppose HJ 18.

As you know, road closures and the decommissioning of roads are contentious issues on our public lands. The amendments to HJ 18 are vital for three reasons:

First, the amended resolution takes aim at "arbitrary" federal actions - and we also do not support "arbitrary" actions by the federal government. That said, there are many valid reasons why federal agencies decommission or rehabilitate roads.

- Rehabilitating some roads on federal lands is critical to protecting Montana's big game and 5-week elk season.
- Road rehabilitation is vital to our economy - in northwest Montana it directly and indirectly puts people to work in the woods - to address watershed restoration and as part of an active timber program.
- Road rehabilitation is vital to Montana's water quality and famous fisheries.
- Road rehabilitation is about protecting other values, not about limiting access.

Second, the amended resolution draws a clear distinction between roads and access to public lands via trails and streams. Access to public lands is not about being able to drive everywhere, which limits the options for other users of public lands.

Third, the amended resolution recognizes the link between road maintenance dollars that the federal agencies receive, and road decommissioning. Given the reality of the huge road maintenance backlogs on our national forests ($55 million on the Flathead Forest alone), eliminating some roads is a pragmatic choice for the agencies.

In closing, with the current amendments the Montana Wilderness Association does not oppose HJ 18. However, if the current amendments are altered or stricken, we oppose this resolution.