

U.S. Forest Service
Informational Testimony to the Senate Natural Resources Committee
House Joint Resolution #9 – Study Wilderness Set-Asides

March 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Terry Chute, and I represent U.S. Forest Service Northern Regional Forester Gail Kimbell. I am unable to appear before the committee in person today, and therefore I am providing written informational testimony regarding wilderness areas and wilderness study areas on National Forest lands in Montana for your consideration.

There are 12 congressionally designated wilderness areas on National Forest System lands in Montana, totaling just under 3,400,000 acres; as well as 7 congressionally designated Wilderness Study Areas totaling about 504,000 acres.

The Forest Service has a comprehensive Wilderness management program. Each summer, Forest Service employees and many volunteers spend thousands of hours completing inventories, monitoring conditions, maintaining trails and campsites, managing outfitter and guide permits, controlling noxious and invasive weeds, and implementing other restoration activities.

Many Montana citizens are actively involved in Wilderness management, and many public/private partnerships have formed to help guide management of our Wilderness areas. For example, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Limits of Acceptable Change Working Group has been actively involved for over 20 years in identifying thresholds for change, monitoring wilderness conditions, evaluating data, and recommending and implementing restoration actions. This group consists of private citizens, outfitters & guides, Back Country Horsemen, MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks, MT Pilots Assoc., conservation organizations, and Federal Land Managers.

Substantial information regarding the current condition of Wilderness areas in Montana currently exists. The Forest Service maintains extensive documentation of Wilderness condition inventories and evaluation, restoration actions undertaken, and accurate maps of the location and size of wilderness areas on National Forest System lands. The Forest Service would gladly provide relevant information to an interim committee or staff should this resolution pass.

Thank you for your time. I can answer questions, or provide further information at your request.

Terry A. Chute
U.S. Forest Service
Montana Capital City Coordinator
Office - (406) 444-5516; Cell - (406) 439-2621

General Wilderness & WSA Data

- **Inventoried Roadless – Montana**

Montana NFS Lands	16.9 million acres
Inventoried Roadless Area Lands	6.4 million acres
Roadless - Percent of Forest Service Landbase in MT	37.9%
Roadless - Percent of MT Landbase	6.8%

- **Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas**

Wilderness areas on NFS lands in MT	12 Wilderness Areas
Wilderness Acres in MT	3,442,416 acres
Wilderness Percent of MT Landbase	3.7%
MT Landbase	145,552 square miles
	94,109,542 acres
NFS Lands - Percent of MT Landbase	18%
Wilderness Study Areas on NFS lands in MT	7 WSA / 504,000 acres
Total Wilderness Acres on NFS Lands in US	34,871,811 acres

Source: Forest Service Roadless Area Web Site and Forest Service Northern Regional Office



**USDA Forest Service
Northern Region
Date: March 17, 2005**

Topic: National Forest Wilderness Areas in Montana

There are twelve congressionally designated Wilderness areas totaling 3,374,126 acres on National Forest System lands in Montana for a. They are:

<u>Wilderness</u>	<u>National Forest</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Date Designated</u>
Absaroka-Beartooth	Custer/Gallatin	936,331	March 27, 1978
Anaconda-Pintler	Beaverhead; Deerfodge; Bitterroot	157,874	September 3, 1964
Bob Marshall	Flathead; Lewis & Clark	1,009,035	September 3, 1964
Cabinet Mountains	Kootenai	94,360	September 3, 1964
Gates of the Mountains	Helena	28,600	September 3, 1964
Great Bear	Flathead	286,700	October 28, 1978
Lee Metcalf	Beaverhead; Gallatin	241,297	October 31, 1983
Mission Mountains	Flathead	73,877	January 3, 1975
Rattlesnake	Lolo	33,000	October 19, 1980
Scapegoat	Helena	239,936	August 20, 1972
Selway Bitterroot ¹	Bitterroot	241,676	September 3, 1964
Welcome Creek	Lolo	28,440	February 24, 1978

¹ additional 1,096,005 acres in Idaho

In accordance with federal law, the Wilderness Act of 1964 and National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans provide direction for management of wilderness areas. These Forest Plans established standards that provide direction on water and air quality, and management of wildlife, fisheries and recreation use. Resource conditions are monitored regularly (typically every five years) and actions taken are if conditions deteriorate beyond an acceptable level. For instance, every Forest in Montana monitors for noxious weed infestations and most have direction to eradicate new infestations by hand pulling or spraying. All Montana National Forests are either revising their Forest Plans or will be within the next few years. Working with the public, the forests will revisit current direction on management of Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas and revise direction where needed. Two key issues that will be addressed are fire and invasive species. Where necessary, forests will consider the use of prescribed fire to reduce unnatural fuel buildup and to prevent fires from escaping wilderness boundaries.

Every National Forest in Montana employs personnel dedicated to Wilderness management. This workforce, consisting of permanent and seasonal employees and volunteers, is critical to managing our Wilderness areas. Montana citizens volunteer thousands of hours annually completing inventory, monitoring, maintaining trails and campsites, and restoring heavily impacted areas.

Montana Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas provide important wildlife habitat and contain many strongholds for Montana's native fisheries. They also provide abundant and diverse opportunities for recreational users, who come from all parts of the United States. Approximately 400 outfitters and guides provide opportunities to people who would not otherwise be able to enjoy Montana's wildlands and rivers.