



**Testimony of John Gatchell**  
**Conservation Director, Montana Wilderness Association**  
**March 25, 2009**  
**House Natural Resources Committee**  
**Re: Vote No on SJ 21**

Thank you Mr Chairman and Committee Members. My name is John Gatchell. I serve as Conservation Director of the Montana Wilderness Association -- founded 50 years ago by Montanans to safeguard our state's wilderness heritage and quiet outdoor traditions.

Our members view Montana wilderness as a public land trust that will always provide great hunting, fishing, camping under the stars, and quiet mountain trails. Our western wild lands embody core American values: freedom, self-reliance, family, tradition.

In recent years our members have taken new approaches to old problems. Through dialogue and negotiation we've buried the hatchet and built new partnerships with former adversaries -- timber workers, snowmobilers, ranchers. In Lincoln we developed a winter recreation partnership with the snowmobile club. We are partners with independent sawmills in Seeley Lake, Deerlodge, Townsend, Missoula and Livingston; We have formed multi-stakeholder partnerships with Back Country Horsemen, hikers and mountain bikers to complete the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Each new partnership is based on the simple fact that Montana is a big state with rugged, diverse landscapes suited to differing combinations of management -the essence of true Multiple Use.

No one was surprised in 2002, when snowmobilers and conservationists were at odds over how to manage the Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area. But when we settled our differences and signed an agreement covering the Big Snowies and Little Belt Mountains two years later – this was something new.

One key principle to finding common ground is to look for give and take across large and varied mountain landscapes.

SJ 21 is a misguided legislative resolution that targets a large landscape level project -the Galton Project –just getting started on the Kootenai National Forest.

The Galton Project covers a large area of national forest (127,000 acres) ranging from urban interface and lower elevation timber to the rugged 34,000-acre 10 Lakes Wilderness Study Area –high in the crown of the mountains.

From the outset, Fortine Ranger Betty Holder has worked very hard to invite people of diverse interests and views to the table.

Her goal is to develop work plans for fuel reduction, public safety, road and trail work, logging, travel management, campground improvements,

handicapped access, watershed, fisheries and wildlife habitat improvements across a wide swath of the Kootenai National Forest - predominantly in the Galton Range east of Eureka.

This is important work, work that is necessary for the U. S. Forest Service to meet its duties and responsibilities under the law.

This resolution is misguided first of all because this project is still in the planning stage. When a draft project plan is formulated, the District Ranger will again invite public involvement and ideas on work people feel are most needed on different parts of this large mountain landscape.

Secondly the resolution provides contradictory directions. On the one hand the resolution calls repeatedly for the Ranger to follow the will of congress – meaning the law. On the other hand the resolution would put the state legislature on record demanding actions –like requiring “at least one loop road in each drainage”-- that cannot be implemented without breaking the law.

The Project Area includes a U. S. Forest Service Scenic Area established in the 1960s where public use and recreational enjoyment is on trails, not roads.

And there are errors of fact: The size of the 10 Lakes Scenic Area is 15,700 acres not 34,000 acres; total acreage of the 1977 Montana Wilderness Study Act is off by hundreds of thousands of acres; Ten Lakes Wilderness Study

Area was designated by Congress and the President with statutory direction for management-- not defacto or lack of management -as alleged.

But even if all factual errors were corrected the resolution is misguided in criticizing a large project that offers an opportunity to bring people together, set aside differences and create jobs managing this beautiful landscape.

If we are going to end the gridlock that paralyzes every aspect of management on Montana's national forests we need to get past the old all or nothing approach represented by this resolution.

Today – conservationists are building new partnerships with Montana sawmills –turning long time adversaries into partners in managing large and diverse national forest landscapes.

Our members are working in partnership with snowmobilers in places like Seeley Lake, Ovando, Phillipsburg, Lewistown and Lincoln. Across the state, collaborative groups are springing up to build new forest partnerships.

The Galton Project covers a large landscape with room for logging, fuel reduction, loop roads, snowmobile areas, quiet trails and wilderness.

Ranger Betty Holder went to high school in Eureka. She is working very hard to bring people together, to meet her duties and break years of paralyzing gridlock created by polarized positions. She deserves your support.

I urge you to vote no on this resolution. Thank you.

**THE GALTON PROJECT  
FORTINE RANGER DISTRICT  
KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST**

**WORK PROJECTS UNDER CONSIDERATION**

- SELECTIVE LOGGING PROJECTS
- UNDERSTORY LOGGING PROJECTS / FUEL REDUCTION
- REGENERATION LOGGING PROJECTS
- NEW TRAIL PROJECTS: WHITEFISH DIVIDE TRAIL, KSANKA FACE TRAIL and OTTER CREEK TRAIL
- CONSTRUCT FISHING ACCESS TO WIGWAM RIVER
- BUILD HANDICAP ACCESS TRAIL: LITTLE THERRIALT LAKE
- INSTALL FIRE RINGS AT CAMPSITES
- IMPROVE TRAILHEADS TO PROVIDE FOR STOCK TRAILERS
- WARMING HUT FOR SNOWMOBILERS: BIG THERRIAULT LAKE
- IMPROVED PARKING AREA AT MURPHY LAKE
- IMPROVEMENTS TO BUNCHGRASS CAMPGROUND
- RESTORE LOCKE CABIN FOR PUBLIC USE
- IMPROVE PUBLIC ACCESS TO SOUTH DICKEY LAKE
- THINNING PROJECTS TO REDUCE FUELS
- POST AND POLE SALES (COMMERCIAL THIN)