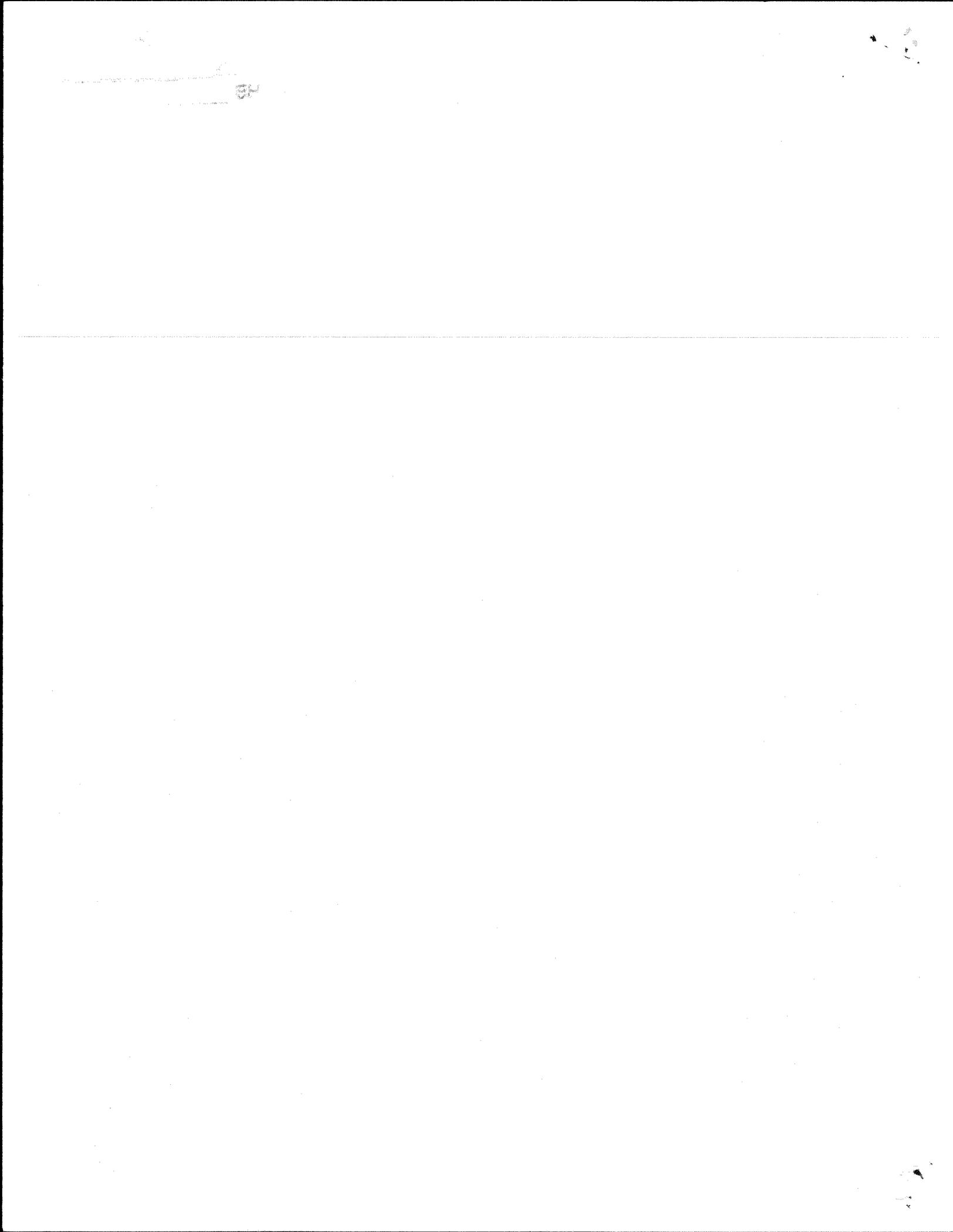


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Sure, Tester introduced the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, and Tester is a Democrat, but it's not a partisan bill. One notable Republican who supports the FJRA is former Montana Gov. Marc Racicot, who wrote an eloquent editorial in support of it in Sept. 2009.

Tester introduced a version of the the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act in 2009, but it was a bill long in the making - and a bill made by Montanans. In particular, the individuals and groups that formed the Three Rivers Challenge in the Yaak Valley, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership in southwestern Montana and the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project in Seeley Lake deserve credit for moving past the rancor and starting productive negotiations.

These folks saw then what we all see now: that fighting about forest management is getting us all nowhere. In fact, it's causing problems. In the last three years since Tester's bill was introduced, western Montana mills have closed and every summer brings another costly wildfire season. We simply cannot allow this slide to continue.

In an editorial board meeting about a month before the election, Daines expressed concern for western Montana's timber industry and spoke about his appreciation for wilderness. But he stopped short of offering his support for what has become Tester's signature legislation.

Daines should spend some time between now and Jan. 3 meeting with folks in western Montana and hearing what they think about the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act. He should reach out to folks like Gordy Sanders at Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake, and Sherm Anderson, who owns Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge. While he's in Deer Lodge, Daines might ask for a meeting with Alan Rome, who owns the Ace Hardware store there. Then he might stop by Libby and talk with the Kootenai Ridge Riders ATV Club. Or, if the snow is really coming down, he could head to Troy and talk to the Troy Snowmobile Club.

These people and groups have a lot of differences. Yet they all support the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act that is the result of compromise with conservation groups and many other Montana stakeholders.

This legislation began as a model for compromise, and it should be enacted the same way.

With the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, Montana has the chance to show the rest of the nation how to get past partisan interests. With Daines' election, Montana has a new opportunity to show Congress how compromise works.

Act will boost fire preparation

The Montana Standard

Editorial

Gordy Sanders, Frank Maradeo and Jim Stone

September 19, 2012

The dog days of summer may be behind us, but the remnants of the recent fire season remind us once again that it pays dividends to be better prepared.

In Montana's Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys, we've learned the hard way that it's better to be ahead of the curve than behind it. That's why we've been using smart investments from a federal program to reduce more and more hazardous fuel loads every year in our forests. Reducing fuel loads before a wildfire arrives provides a more effective buffer to adjacent homes and communities and makes conditions safer for our firefighters to work in.

Funding from the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program is also allowing us to improve elk habitat and clean up damaged streams. This work wouldn't be taking place today if we hadn't come together six years ago to propose a better vision for managing our forests. The principles of the vision are simple:

- 1) Forests surrounding our communities can be managed better for forest health, from thinning projects and prescribed burns to road removal and stream restoration.
- 2) Local people should be enriching their own economy by getting the jobs to do this work.
- 3) Complementary to more active management is a need for improved protections for our cherished backcountry wilderness because these places increase in value as our valleys fill up with more people.

These principles helped us craft a citizen-proposed plan we called the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship project. It was named for the two valleys where it was exhaustively hashed out at community meetings and at kitchen tables.

The original legislative proposal that defined our shared vision included \$400,000/year for 10 years to do more forest work on the Seeley Lake Ranger District, the addition of 87,000 acres of recommended wilderness to the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountains wilderness areas, and cost-sharing for a co-generation facility at Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake.

This proposal eventually became a component of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act which is sitting in the halls of Congress right now. Although we are still waiting for Congress to pass our bill, we have continued to advance our vision through other avenues.

Some skeptics of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act complain that the only thing it guarantees is wilderness and that forest management won't ever occur. The proof is already as plain to see as day. In the Lolo, Helena, and Flathead national forests, we are already helping to achieve our original restoration and management goals ten times over through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

Since work started in 2010, the Collaborative Forest Restoration program has, among other things, reduced fuels on over 2,300 acres in the wildland-urban interface, restored forest health and resiliency on over 5,400 acres outside the WUI, produced over 8000 truckloads of commercial forest products, restored 19 miles of streams, treated weeds on almost 25,000 acres, and helped create or maintain 280 local jobs.

As we celebrate these enormous achievements, we are still waiting for the wilderness and the additional forest work that is promised once the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act becomes law. Passage of this bill will galvanize more investments and more resources to undertake responsible forest management and be better prepared for the next fire season.

— Gordy Sanders works for Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Frank Maradeo is the chief of the Seeley Lake rural fire station and Jim Stone runs Rolling Stone Ranch.

Guest Editorial: Separating myth from fact in FJRA

Montana Standard

Jack Kirkley

Pintler Audubon Society

January 31, 2012

Shortly after Senator Jon Tester introduced his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA), I got a call from a woman worried about Tester taking away her elderly friends' right to drive their pickup into the East Pioneer Mountains to enjoy summer picnics.

"Wait a minute," I replied. "Don't you and your friends understand

that wilderness only involves the wildest, most remote places where there are no roads?" I explained that the places where we drive on forest roads aren't roadless lands. They're not affected in any way by wilderness designations.

Unfortunately, that woman's misconception isn't too unusual - judging from letters to the editor that criticize Tester's bill. This should be no real surprise, because wilderness opponents have always made the deceptive claim that wilderness "locks the public out" of public land.

Despite decades of debate over roadless forest management and wilderness, too many Montanans still seem unable to distinguish facts from myths about wilderness.

A prime example of this ongoing confusion about what wilderness designation does and doesn't do appeared as a commentary in the Jan. 2 Montana Standard. In that column, snowmobile club representatives from Dillon, Wisdom and Wise River rattled off a series of myths and distortions:

Myth 1: "We are already surrounded by wilderness created in portions of the East Pioneers, Anaconda Pintlers and Bitterroot Range."

Fact: There is no designated wilderness in the East Pioneers, despite 25 years of recommendations by the Forest Service that the area should be managed as wilderness. The Bitterroot Range, which forms most of the spectacular high mountain boundary between Montana and Idaho, boasts as wilderness only one limited segment of that entire range, a piece located west of the towns of Darby and Stevensville. Not a single acre of designated wilderness exists in Bitterroot Range bordering the snowmobile clubs' southwestern Montana communities. The only high mountain wilderness in the southwestern corner of Montana is the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness, a natural gem that folks in this area are proud of protecting. Critics complain about too much wilderness, but Montana's 15 designated wilderness areas only amount to 3.7 percent of the state. Surrounded by too much wilderness? Hardly.

Myth 2: "Businesses in the surrounding areas would suffer significant income losses if these lands were locked up as wilderness."

Fact: "Locked up as wilderness?" As Ronald Reagan said, "Well, there you go again!" FJRA has very little effect on the overall availability of summertime motorized recreation routes, and it leaves open nearly all of the snowmobiling country used by the average sledder. Most of the proposed wilderness acreages are remote, devoid of trails, and, in many cases are geographically inaccessible to vehicles or are already managed as nonmotorized areas by the land management agencies. Thousands of miles of recreational roads and trails will still be available to ATVs and snowmobiles, providing plenty of customers for local businesses. Meanwhile, economic studies have shown that Montana counties that contain or border wilderness exhibit stronger economic growth than the counties that lack wilderness.

Myth 3: "The Act would restrict all snowmobile activity to congested trail corridors and prohibit snowmobiling in the open parks and meadows adjacent to the trail system."

Fact: Nowhere in Tester's bill is there any type of sitespecific regulation on snowmobile use that prohibits driving off a designated trail or use of open meadow play areas. Any such trail regulations are entirely up to local area land managers. Tester's bill does nothing to change that.

Myth 4: "This bill adversely affects summer and fall cattle grazing range opportunities by either prohibiting grazing or by preventing the moving of salt and cattle using motorized means."

Fact: That's the biggest whopper of all. The 1964 Wilderness Act and the Congressional Grazing Guidelines of 1990 effectively "grandfather" all pre-existing practices of livestock operators. Wilderness does not prohibit grazing, nor does it stop ranchers from continuing to use motor vehicles to move salt and cattle, or to maintain fences, dams and stock water structures. Tester's bill also includes additional language to specifically protect the interests of livestock operators in southwestern Montana. Dillon rancher Wally Congdon, District 3 director of the

Montana Cattlemen's Association, strongly praised Tester's bill in his congressional testimony in Washington, D.C., last May. So, are those snowmobile club spokesmen really worried about grazing, or are they grasping for straws?

I could list dozens of other examples of myths and false propaganda foisted on the public by anti-wilderness folks, but you get the point. Anti-wilderness folks should just come clean: They should simply admit that they hate the very idea of protecting nature for its own sake - and for the sake of folks who prefer quiet landscapes for hunting, fishing, hiking and other kinds of nonmotorized recreation. Wilderness opponents should admit they only see value in a developed, mechanized landscape.

Tester's bill represents a giant step in the right direction of responsible resource stewardship. It protects some wilderness and recreation areas, but it also promotes a balanced approach that allows logging and forest restoration in appropriate places. FJRA is built on compromise and it deserves to be enacted based on its merits. Montanans must not allow themselves to be misled by anti-wilderness misinformation and false propaganda.

Guest opinion: Coalition built trust to create balanced forest bill

Billings Gazette

Robyn King, Gordy Sanders and Tom France

Yaak Valley Forest Council, Pyramid Mountain Lumber, National Wildlife Federation

January 28, 2012

Montana's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act again came close to passage last month. The bill aimed at creating jobs and improving forest management enjoys strong support in Montana and growing support in the U.S. Senate.

By talking, we learned that many things that people and groups want from the forest aren't mutually exclusive.

But as FJRA gains momentum, opponents appear to be shifting tactics. Because so many Montanans have united around FJRA's collaborative approach to creating jobs and resolving national forest conflicts, outright opposition has become politically imprudent.

So we now hear proposals to change the forest jobs bill by requiring completion of the logging and thinning before resource-protection provisions take effect. Known as "trigger language," this suggestion is a red

herring — a made-in-Washington poison-pill provision that Congress has rejected time and again as unworkable.

In other words, if you can't stop FJRA on the merits, attach a provision that would effectively kill it.

Trigger language is borrowed from epic forest fights of the past, the same fights that many of us have left behind. The many Montanans who've had a hand in writing FJRA are focused on Montana's future, not its past.

We want a future that guarantees 100,000 acres of timber harvest over 15 years. We want a future where forest restoration projects are judged in court not just by short-term impacts to the land but also by the long-term benefit to the land. We want a future that ensures our clean water and wildlife won't be held hostage by partisan politics. FJRA aims to advance these solutions now instead of wasting more time fighting over trigger language.

For decades, Montanans fought to a stalemate over how to manage our national forests. Some wanted more logging, others more designated wilderness. Off-road-vehicle enthusiasts wanted more places to ride, while hikers pushed for more areas closed to machines. No interest group or industry in Montana has enough clout to overwhelm the others, but they all have the ability to say no.

Frustration is what brought together Montanans from diverse interests together in communities from Troy to Seeley Lake to Deer Lodge and beyond. We knew we could do better than the unacceptable status quo.

We found to our delight that the common ground was bigger than anyone had imagined. It turns out loggers like to hunt and fish as much as anyone. Wilderness wanderers need paychecks, too. We all need clean water. Most Montanans use national forests in several ways.

By talking, we learned that many things that people and groups want from the forest aren't mutually exclusive. We also found not everything should boil down to partisan politics. Also, it turns out we don't have to agree on everything to agree on many things.

We found agreement in collaborative proposals for forest management in the Yaak, the Blackfoot-Clearwater region and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National forest. The proposals are tailored to specific areas but include a combination of timber harvest, forest restoration, recreation — motorized and non-motorized — and wildland protections.

The agreements strike balance. Fewer than 45 miles of roads or trails would be closed to motorized vehicles under FJRA — leaving thousands of miles open to off-road vehicle enthusiasts. In fact, for the first time, FJRA would establish permanent recreation areas for snowmobilers.

And by working together, we developed trust in one another. Trust was the catalyst for FJRA. Trust holds us together and creates hope for the future.

That trust translates into a commitment by a broad coalition of Montanans to continue working together in our communities, in court when necessary and in the forests — well after this forest jobs bill becomes law.

Anybody who tries to undermine this trust creates peril for Montana's struggling timber industry and the good jobs it provides. FJRA will create logging and forest-restoration jobs. Trust the leaders of our timber industry when they tell you that.

Loggers, hunters and anglers, business owners, wilderness users, community leaders and so many others united behind FJRA are working on far more than a piece of legislation. We're working to create a better future for Montana.

Won't you join us? We welcome your support.

Tester's forest jobs bill would boost state industry

Billings Gazette

Loren Rose

December 21, 2011

As timber mill owners and managers in Montana, we're disappointed that the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, a bill to create jobs for loggers and mill workers, was prevented from passing in Congress last week. Hundreds of workers in our mills, along with hundreds of independent contractors and vendors we work with, all supporting hundreds of families and whole communities throughout Western Montana, are disappointed by congressional inaction on this bill.

For the last five years, we've been working closely with people who don't always agree with us. Together, we've developed a new way to approach forest management that creates jobs by requiring more work to get done in the woods while also protecting the places that we all love to hunt and fish.

We're not going to give up. The gridlock in the forests — not to mention Congress — bolsters our belief that Montanans have far more to gain by focusing on our agreements instead of our differences.

Obviously, not everyone agrees even on that point, including our lone voice in the House of Representatives, Denny Rehberg. But the majority of Montanans do agree. Polls have shown strong public support for this bill, and as Montanans push harder in the months ahead for forest jobs, recreation opportunities and better stewardship overall, we want our congressman to start pulling on our behalf.

7,000 Montana jobs

The total value of Montana's primary wood and paper products was approximately \$325 million last year, and our industry employed almost 7,000 people. That's a huge economic input, especially during a recession. And we have the potential to be much more productive in the future, if politicians start working together in D.C. like we've been working together here in Montana.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is the best example of legislation that would help our industry move forward. First introduced in July 2009 by Sen. Jon Tester and soon endorsed by Sen. Max Baucus, the bill incorporates three community-based, collaborative proposals to improve forest stewardship in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and portions of the Lolo and Kootenai national forests. Each part of the bill represents years of hard work by people in communities with close ties to the forest.

We want to be clear, this bill will create and maintain jobs in our wood products industry. It mandates responsible timber harvest and restoration and it sets up collaborative processes that would leverage cooperation over conflict. It's a bill that tackles some of the most difficult challenges that the Forest Service faces when they're trying to get a forest restoration project from planning to implementation and we believe it would result in better decisions and less litigation.

It's also a balanced bill that protects many of the places that are most important to hunters, anglers and conservationists, from the Centennial Range to West Pioneers to the Blackfoot and Yaak river valleys. That's why horsemen, bicyclists, snowmobilers and hikers all signed on.

Reasonable balance

The worst anyone can say about this bill is that it strives for a reasonable balance instead of ideological purity. Extremists don't like the bill. Critics include people who oppose all logging, every wilderness designation, or any hint of compromise.

How much longer will it take to pass the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act? What will it take to pull our congressional delegation together on our behalf? We can only guess.

One thing is clear: Defending the status quo and fighting the old fight seems more and more out of touch with each passing day. That type of approach does a disservice to all those who have worked so hard to move Montana forward. We encourage Rep. Rehberg to move forward with us.

Stalled land management finally moving forward thanks to Tester's plan

The Missoulian

Dale Bosworth

Norther Regional Forester 1997-2001, U.S. Forest Service Chief 2001-2007

October 21, 2011

I served as Regional Forester for the Forest Service here in Montana and as the Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. Over the years, I have watched how the heavy traffic of opinion about public land management has grown more and more contentious, until our management processes resemble traffic jams. As so much comes to a halt, our forests suffer.

More recently however, I've found cause for encouragement in the local community partnerships on three national forests in Montana, partnerships that laid the groundwork for Sen. Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

Like many Montanans, I read the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act when it was first introduced and I let Tester know that I supported his efforts, but I also took the time to offer a few suggestions. Then, over the next couple of years, I watched as something very uncommon happened. As the suggestions came in, changes were made and the bill got better and better.

With the news that the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act may move forward in the Senate, as part of the Interior Appropriations bill, I think it's important to recognize why this legislation is both necessary and timely.

First, there are many areas in Montana that are long overdue for being protected as Wilderness. Almost half of the elk harvested in Montana come off the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, where most of the lands in this bill are located. The elk are there because the backcountry is there. Many of these special places, from the Sapphires to the Centennials, have been in limbo for decades and it's time for Congress to act.

Second, Tester's bill will enable the agency to take a larger, watershed approach to managing our forests. It gives the agency tools to help it succeed. And, it requires the use of stewardship contracting to accomplish much needed restoration work on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge and Kootenai national forests. This tool allows the Forest Service to harvest timber and reinvest that income in other local projects like removing unusable roads so that elk can flourish, or restoring streambeds to support native fish. I strongly support the use of

stewardship contracting and I believe it is the tool of the future for accomplishing needed work on national forest system land.

Third - and perhaps most important - this bill is based on collaborative efforts across Montana. Members of communities from Deer Lodge to Troy who have historically been at odds did the hard work of working together. And they have stuck with it. That itself is huge. We need to make sure these efforts are rewarded so that we can build even stronger partnerships in the future.

The chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee said this about the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and the work that went into it: "Decisions on how to use and protect our natural resources are never simple or clear cut. They require commitment and fortitude. They force conversations and compromise. They make us stronger by overcoming differences and looking toward the future."

I commend Montanans for working together on this vision. After a career of 41 years as a steward of our national forests, I'm truly encouraged by their commitment and fortitude.

Forest Jobs Restoration Act: Tester bill builds on local vision

The Missoulian

Daphne Herling

Former Montana Wilderness Association president

May 11, 2011

Bravo to the members of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project whose op-ed recently appeared in the Missoulian (April 28). Key to their success has been the inclusive nature of developing the agreed-upon management approach.

However, the authors encourage passage of Sen. Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act to build upon and complete the work they have begun. Until the iconic landscapes are permanently protected for wildlife habitat and as sources of clean water, the work isn't yet done.

Big game requires big country; almost 700,000 acres of habitat are set aside by this act. The lands identified in the FJRA include some of the best elk, sheep, bear, deer, moose and goat hunting in the state of Montana.

Further, FJRA helps stabilize one of the most important economic drivers in Montana, tourism and recreation, by providing more than 1 million acres of protected Wilderness and Special Management Areas managed specifically for recreation and tourism. According to the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, out-of-state visitors to Montana spend more than \$2.3 billion annually.

FJRA means restoration, timber, recreation, and wilderness protection, which add up to economic development and jobs for Montana. Thank you, Tester, for seeing the vision developed by local groups to protect our lands and way of life.

Forest jobs bill created by coalition of effort

Missoulian

Jon Tester

May 9, 2011

As required by my provision in a recent federal law, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week removed Montana's wolves from the endangered species list and returned their management to state biologists. It is a

bipartisan victory that recognizes Montana's wolf recovery as a success. As your senator, it's my job to find solutions that are right for Montana, no matter how controversial or tough the issue is.

Montana needs responsible wildlife management. We need smart natural resource development. And for future generations, we need to protect the land, clean water and fresh air we're blessed with.

I have a responsibility to do all those things with policies that foster job creation in Montana. And that's why, earlier this year, I reintroduced a landmark jobs bill - the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

I will continue to push for this bill because it's a popular plan that enjoys broad support from Democrats, Republicans and Independents. It's right for Montana.

That's because it was made by Montanans. As I have said many times before, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act doesn't just belong to me. It was created over the course of several years by a broad coalition of people.

Anyone willing to compromise had a seat at the table. And so, setting aside their differences, loggers, millworkers, sportsmen, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts worked together to find common ground. I know the value of consensus-building. That's why I turned their ideas into legislation.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is the right solution for a unique set of challenges.

Congress often tells the Forest Service what it can't do. My bill would be the first time Congress tells the Forest Service what it will do.

It will put folks back to work in our forests by directing the Forest Service to take on large restoration projects - thinning timber on 100,000 acres over 15 years and improving habitat. The bill permanently sets aside motorized recreation areas for trail-riding and snowmobiling, a first in Montana. And, for the first time in 28 years, it sets aside wilderness in some of Montana's wildest backcountry.

Some people would rather not solve problems. They're good at making excuses, laying blame, and saying "no" because it's easier and serves their own interests. But working together is the responsible thing to do. Working hard and finding common ground are Montana values. That's why most Montanans support this bill.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act has been the subject of healthy, public debate for nearly two years. Since the day of its introduction, each version of my bill has been available online for anyone to read and scrutinize.

I've taken feedback from hundreds of Montanans and I've held numerous public input sessions. I revised the bill several times based on that input.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act was built with the transparency I brought to the Senate.

Some will continue to claim otherwise. But those claims are politically motivated. Montanans - and the forests we rely on - deserve better.

They deserve a responsible plan to create jobs. They deserve a bipartisan plan to manage our forests and bring them back to health. They deserve the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

For new wilderness to succeed, next generation must have interest

Missoulian

Sally Mauk

Montana Public Radio

July 16, 2010

In another life, I was a wilderness ranger, and to this day there's a certain trail in a certain wilderness where I am most at peace with myself and with the world.

After walking the first mile, the torrent of life's minutiae flooding my brain has slowed to a trickle. By the second mile, I'm finally starting to notice the lacy light sneaking through the hemlock and the faint, sweet whiff of wild ginger. And by the time I take a very quick dip in the melted-ice cube waters of the small alpine lake that is the reward of the final, steep switchback, I am a much better person than I was at the trailhead.

It's Chris Brown's job to make sure I have this special, redemptive place to visit when I need to. Brown is director of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers for the U.S. Forest Service, the guy in charge of the 36 million acres of wilderness out of the 193 million acres of national forest.

"My job is to keep wilderness wild and keep wild and scenic rivers, free-flowing," he said.

It's a big job.

Brown was in Missoula recently to talk about the challenges facing America's wilderness areas, and they are many - everything from film crews wanting access to shoot a documentary, to miners wanting to dig out copper and silver or ranchers wanting to expand their grazing leases. Keeping the promise of the 1964 Wilderness Act, to preserve these lands "untrammelled" can seem quaint in a world increasingly separated from wildness. When more and more people can't stand being out of cell phone range for one minute, the notion of being out of flush toilet range seems even more untenable.

Yet, Brown is not discouraged that the current fan base needed to "keep wilderness wild" is immediately shrinking.

"When you look at the kind of support in Congress that wilderness designation is getting, when you look at the kind of use we're getting in our wilderness areas, we feel there is still a strong national consensus in favor of wilderness," said Brown.

He points out that 2 million acres of new wilderness were added in nine states in 2009. Montana was not one of those states. The

last time a Montana wilderness bill passed Congress was in 1988. It would have added 5 million new acres of wilderness, but was vetoed by President Ronald Reagan - a veto widely seen as based not on the merits of the legislation, but as a political favor to help elect a Republican senator.

Sen. Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation

Act would create a much less ambitious 600,000 acres of new wilderness, but that bill is languishing in a committee, and Tester is not promising it will pass the Senate before this session ends.

Brown admits getting new wilderness "is a somewhat torturous process," but he says with 17 wilderness bills pending, "and the fact that each and every year congress is adding wilderness," it's not impossible.

Brown's biggest worry is the next generation's interest in wilderness and the outdoors in general.

The seminal book "Last Child in the Woods" convincingly details the growing alienation children have with the natural world. Brown says it's a huge concern not just for wilderness stewards like himself, but for the entire Forest Service:

"Getting kids out is a huge challenge for the nation. ... And for our future constituency, it's absolutely essential."

Soon after you read this, I'll be taking my grand-niece and two grand-nephews from Kansas on that certain trail in a certain wilderness, for their first wilderness experience. If they find it more scary than wondrous - or worse, more boring - then Brown's successors are going to have their hands full keeping wilderness wild, and wild and scenic rivers flowing freely.

I'm betting on the kids. We just need to get them to the trailhead.

Forest bill a fragile compromise worth saving

Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Editorial

June 16, 2010

A deal's a deal.

That's the message Montana Sen. Jon Tester has for the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. And, in reality, he has little choice.

Tester's forest bill came out of a delicate compromise among diverse forest user groups. It would create some 600,000 acres of wilderness - mostly here in Southwest Montana. But it would also set aside areas for motorized recreation and require the logging of 10,000 acres of forest in each of the next 10 years.

The diverse bill was crafted by representatives of wilderness advocates, motorized recreationists and timber industry representatives. And that mix has made for widespread - if fragile - support for the bill.

But now members of the Senate committee are proposing to strip the logging and motorized recreation out of the bill and just establish the wilderness areas.

Senate memories are apparently not all that long. It's been more than 20 years since the Montana congressional delegation came close to passing wilderness-protection legislation. That measure designated wilderness and wilderness only - more than 5 million acres around the state - and made it through the Democrat-controlled House and Senate only to be vetoed by then-Republican President Ronald Reagan, who had absolutely no stake in the Montana wilderness politics.

Such is the divisive nature of Montana wilderness politics. Even an act of Congress is not enough to resolve the issue. The veto essentially stalled any progress on the issue for more than two decades.

Tester's bill is an experiment of sorts. It only deals with a portion of the state, and it does a whole lot more than just designate wilderness. It includes something meaningful for a range of forest users - not just wilderness advocates. And that is what has created a consensus of support that rises above the politics of Washington.

If the Senate committee strips out all but the wilderness designations, as it is proposing to do, it will self-destruct. Support for the bill will crumble and it is doomed. It's that simple.

Tester has said he will come up with a counter-offer to the committee's proposal this week, but he will not be able to stray far from the original bill, or opposition will begin lining up - and it will be formidable.

If Tester can hold this measure together and move the Montana wilderness debate off the dime, it may offer a template for resolving this decades-old conundrum for the entire state.

ASUM excited about Tester forest proposal

Missoulian

Matt Fennell

Associated Students of the University of Montana president

April 20, 2010

Recently, a committed group of conservationists came together to passionately discuss Sen. Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act. The energy and excitement surrounding this legislation is nothing short of inspiring.

As president of the Associated Students of the University of Montana, I am filled with great pride because ASUM officially endorsed Tester's bill last fall and has championed it ever since. It is bold, it is here, and it's about time. We students should feel privileged, honored and responsible because this bill represents the future of conservation and forward-thinking forest management, and the University of Montana is at the center of the dialogue.

The University of Montana graduates roughly 2,000 students every year and many of us want to stay in a Montana that not only recognizes the importance of preserving our landscapes, but a state that has leaders committed to sustaining and supporting green collar jobs.

As future recreation managers, foresters and conservationists we want to see a rich blend of activities on public land, activities that include the cultivation of home-grown timber, wilderness recreation, and responsible motorized travel when and where it is appropriate. We want these activities balanced on public land so that our last best places will always be a haven for wildlife and for people. We believe that our public lands should no longer be grounds for a tug of war.

For young people and young professionals today, is not simply a question of development or strict preservation - we are not that polarized, we are not that simplistic. Ultimately we are all conservationists. We want to grow and sustain our state's economy by investing in rural economies and long-term conservation of public lands because they are not mutually exclusive goals.

This legislation is good for Montana and it is good for Missoula. It designates new wilderness areas, and expands existing areas. It will protect four major tributaries of the Clark Fork River: Rock Creek, Monture Creek, the North Fork of the Blackfoot and the headwaters of the Clearwater River. These waters replenish the Missoula aquifer and help ensure clean drinking water that no engineered system could do quite as beautifully, quite as

elegantly, or as inexpensively. We can take to heart that one of the economic engines that fuels Missoula, our beloved Clark Fork River, will be solidly protected by this bill.

The university has long been a center of excellence in forest management and conservation, and as the rest of the country turns towards Montana, they are expecting progressive governance of our natural resources and forward-thinking legislation that breaks through the political gridlock on public lands.

This bill may have its critics, but it is a product of years of collaboration on the part of conservation organizations, loggers and recreation enthusiasts who have come together to create workable solutions to generate and sustain vibrant rural economies and maintain healthy forest landscapes.

Students are hungry for change and eager for action. We want a Montana that gets things done. I represent students who embrace the wisdom of cooperation and applaud Tester for his leadership.

Old school ideas don't cut it in Montana forests

Billings Gazette

Daphne Herling

Montana Wildlife Association volunteer president

February 27, 2010

There are those who believe in the old school way of doing things and those of us who believe in a new way of doing things.

Unfortunately for Montana's forests and the people who depend on them, the old school way of doing things hasn't worked out so well. Years ago, even mainstream conservation groups like the Montana Wilderness Association were at war with the timber industry. Because of years of fighting, neither side got what they wanted. Nobody won. And everyone paid the price.

Thank goodness we, the current members and supporters of the Montana Wilderness Association decided to rise above the old school way of doing things. We put aside our differences with Montana's local timber mills and recreation enthusiasts, and realized we had much more in common. Working together, we came up with a new plan that will actually move us forward instead of keep us in the past. That plan evolved to become the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

Some folks are blinded by ideology and want to keep on fighting until the last man is standing. So it's no wonder some of the old school extremes - from the Wild West Institute on the left to Citizens for Balanced Use on the right - seem to be singing from

the same sheet. Sadly, for these folks the truth seems optional.

But most Montanans are smarter than that. They want solutions. They like to know that their favorite hiking spots and elk hunting haunts won't be ruined by traffic and machines. They are also concerned that the bottom is dropping out of our timber industry, just as an unprecedented outbreak of pine beetles is killing great swaths of pines and firs.

News reporters are naturally drawn to the fights around the fringes, but we all need to look at the consensus in the center. The groups who do support the bill represent tens of thousands of Montanans.

From many different viewpoints this bill is not perfect. The democratic process requires negotiation and compromise to be successful; but working together, we're all better off.

We have a choice to protect our forests. We can keep on doing what we've done too long, pounding the table, refusing to compromise, and getting nothing done. Or we can work together with our fellow Montanans on a new way, and actually accomplish something.

The Montana Wilderness Association has a 50-year history of protecting the best of Montana. MWA is not content to sit on the laurels of the old school. There is too much at stake. We know that our mission of protecting our wild country and healthy ecosystems requires the complicated and messy work of finding solutions. It's easier to stand back and lob rocks, but that would be a dereliction of our duty. And besides, there are plenty of folks on both extremes who are happy to play that role.

Tester's forest jobs bill: Bill is true collaborative effort

The Western News

Bruce Farling

Executive Director, Montana Trout Unlimited

January 14, 2010

When Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester introduced his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act last July, he did something that is all too uncommon in today's political world. He kept a promise.

He'd told conservationists, loggers and recreationists that if they could reach agreement on contentious issues involving public lands – including wilderness designation, deciding where logging and habitat restoration is appropriate, and, most importantly, getting popular support for their ideas – he'd introduce a bill to help implement their vision.

That's exactly what this landmark legislation does. It takes the hard work of people in the Yaak country of northwest Montana and in the Seeley Lake and Blackfoot regions north of Missoula, and of recreationists

and those who make a living around the sprawling Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in the southwest corner of the state, and it packages it into a measure that:

- Protects 670,000 acres of some of Montana's finest wildlands as wilderness and another 300,000 acres as national recreation areas.
- Aids local mills by directing the Forest Service to do some sort of mechanical removal of vegetation for 10 years, through commercial logging, thinning or post and pole sales, for instance. This would affect extremely small portions of the Kootenai and Beaverhead-Deerlodge national forests – about one-quarter of 1 percent in one year. The value of the trees removed will be re-invested in the forest – used to help restore damaged habitats.

The bill also creates new partnerships with the Forest Service by ensuring that the agency works first with citizen groups on where and how these restoration projects will take place.

Is the Tester bill a good bill? Well, polling indicates that more than two-thirds of Montanans think so. Montanans are especially pleased because it came about because people with conflicting interests worked out their differences.

Sherm Anderson, who owns a mill in Deer Lodge and helped develop some of the ideas in the measure, is a leading timber spokesman. He once opposed wilderness designations. But not now. Sherm regularly remarks to me: "Sometimes I can't believe how far we've both come." I tell him, it's about time.

Of course, the bill has its detractors. Some of them seem threatened by the prospect of people working together. They fear that cooperation will dilute the shouting and intimidation-by-litigation coming from the polar extremes in debates over land management.

Especially disappointing has been the small band of environmentalists who complain that the bill was developed secretly and they were shut out.

Hardly. The bill results from ideas discussed for nearly four years in hundreds of face-to-face meetings, including with local government, conservationists, recreationists, ranchers and others.

As a proponent, I have been at many of these meetings. We explained our ideas and sought advice for improvement. Sen. Tester did the same, and he changed the bill based on what he heard. And that effort continues. The proposals embodied in the measure have been in the press, on the Web and detailed in publications for nearly four years. They certainly haven't been kept secret.

The only people "shut out" of the process were those who early on chose to be excluded. They attacked Sen. Tester, his bill and its supporters in blogs, e-mails, the media and in name-calling newspaper ads. Their message has been clear: They will never support legislation that accommodates timber interests or that runs counter to their self-righteous view of how public lands should be managed. Their approach can best be seen in their years of redundant legal challenges to the Forest Service.

The only contribution these opponents have offered is invective and "our way or no way" indignation. The environmental critics have lectured and patronized us, but they have never contacted me or other proponents and offered to sit down and explore common ground. I believe that's because they don't accept the basic premise of this bill: Everybody must get something.

Meanwhile, many others have had their say. That's why Trout Unlimited, the Montana Wilderness Association and the National Wildlife Federation – which collectively have nearly 15,000 grassroots members in Montana – have been joined by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, The Wilderness Society, American Rivers, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and other conservation interests in supporting the bill.

That's why rural and urban county commissions support the measure, as do timber associations, ranchers, motorized and non-motorized recreationists, unions (including Montana's largest), business people, legislators, Montana Democrats Gov. Brian Schweitzer and Sen. Max Baucus and former Montana Republican Gov. Marc Racicot.

The support for the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is unprecedented. All it took was open-mindedness and civility. Now what's wrong with that?

A conservationist's wish list for the new year

Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Jeff Welsch

Greater Yellowstone Coalition

January 10, 2010

The economy might have soured in 2009, but the world's love of Yellowstone National Park certainly didn't. Despite thinning pocketbooks and growing anxieties — or perhaps because of both — a record-shattering 3.3 million people visited the world's first national park. The lesson here is that whether the economy is bullish or bearish, Yellowstone is a magical place where people of all backgrounds can restore their spirit.

These numbers also underscore the importance of protecting Yellowstone and the vast lands surrounding it, so that future generations may experience similar joy and wonder in one of the last great temperate ecosystems on the planet.

Happily, 2009 was a very good year for the future of Greater Yellowstone. Among the major successes: Endangered Species Act safeguards were returned to grizzly bears, whose key food source — the whitebark pine — is disappearing. President Obama signed into law the bipartisan Omnibus Public Lands Management Act, which added 387 miles of Greater Yellowstone streams to the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System. And the unique wilderness character of the rugged Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area south of Bozeman was given the protection it merits.

With those achievements as a backdrop, here is a conservationist's Montana wish list for 2010:

PASSAGE OF SEN. JON TESTER'S FOREST JOBS & RECREATION ACT

Now here's a novel idea: Bring Montanans of all stripes to the table, iron out their differences and come to a resolution over some long-standing public-land management issues. Tester's legislation protects Montana's hunting, fishing and camping traditions in some extraordinary wild places critical to fish and wildlife. It ensures recreational access for motorized enthusiasts to some of their favorite outdoor playgrounds. And it gives people the tools to help mitigate wildfires and restore forests turning brown from bark beetles.

More than anything, it is Montanans coming together to resolve a Montana issue. All Montanans willing to work toward solutions were welcome at the table, and proposals were then taken on the road to seek input from people who weren't originally at the table.

Polls show that Montanans overwhelmingly support Tester's boots-on-the-ground efforts. Let's hope Congress gets the message.

MORE ROOM TO ROAM FOR BISON

Incredibly, Yellowstone bison — the last remnants of vast herds that once roamed our prairies by the millions — are the only creatures in America largely confined by the boundaries of a park.

It's time to break the bureaucratic gridlock over these iconic symbols of the American West and provide appropriate places for free-ranging wild herds.

Montana is long overdue in creating a long-term management plan that allows brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison that migrate from the park to be restored to wildlife refuges, parks and Native American lands.

A place to start is with 88 bison quarantined for two years in pens north of the park. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has proposed moving 14 to a state park in Wyoming and 74 to a private ranch south of Bozeman.

The alternative is to deliver these animals back into the park, where they'll likely contract brucellosis and re-migrate out, only to be driven back inside a line on a map. Or, worse, they'll be sent to slaughter.

For decades, these shaggy "Monarchs of the Plains" have been treated more like livestock than wildlife. Surely we can do better for a creature revered enough in our national consciousness to adorn the U.S. Park Service logo, Wyoming state flag and even some of our currency.

MOVE CLOSER TO A RESOLUTION ON YELLOWSTONE WINTER USE

Yet another environmental impact statement on Yellowstone winter use is in the works, and we probably won't know the results until 2011. But chances are the EIS will say what we already know: The sooner we evolve to modern snowcoach and human-powered access to Yellowstone in winter, the better it will be for the park's fragile resources and wildlife.

Of those 3.3 million visitors, 1.3 million came through West Yellowstone. It's clear the town has more than snowmobiles going for it. The sooner such gateway communities have clarity, the sooner they can transition to a new winter economy.

Stalemates must end over Montana forests

Missoulian

Robert Johnson

Leadership Montana

January 5, 2010

In a recent guest opinion (Missoulian, Nov. 9), Paul Edwards calls Sen. Jon Tester's bill "a federal welfare program for the forest products industry" in the state of Montana. Edwards is far from right. Tester's bill is not an act to save a few mills but is a necessary step toward better forest management.

These forests are important to all of us. There is logging and recreation as well as 600,000 acres of wilderness set aside for public use. These lands and forests belong to the citizens of the United States. The National Forest Management Act of 1977 called for the U.S. Forest Service to manage all public forested lands while mandating that social, economical and recreational uses would not be affected. Montana has more than 20.6 million acres of forested lands with 12.9 million acres under U.S. Forest Service

management. Tester and the USFS realize one cannot manage the forest without a forest products industry. This industry has a wide base in Montana affecting everything from our environment to our economy.

There are over 9,000 jobs directly related to the timber industry and approximately 25 percent of the state's economy is based on forest products. This is not a small industry that can be easily replaced. Montana has gone from the fourth-highest income per capita to 49th during the last 40 years as the industry has been reduced. Now the state only has 15 major forest products manufacturers left. If these businesses were gone, how would one manage our forests? States like New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah have no forest products industry left and their forests are being decimated by overgrowth and disease.

Over the past 30 years we have seen less logging and forest management outside of state and private efforts. We have seen forest firefighting policy go from controlling fires to protecting homes and stopping natural fire management. This has led to very high-density forests. The current mountain pine beetle infestation has become an epidemic, affecting over 3 million acres and continuing to grow exponentially.

The reality here is that our forests are staged to have a fire season much like the one of 1910; possibly worse. The combination of beetle kill, high-density growth and few active management projects has led to a scenario where the fires will be so hot they would sterilize the ground, allowing nothing to grow for years. Recognizing the possible impact carbon can have on climate change, one can easily see how these fires could make matters worse. Trees could be less of a carbon sink, absorbing carbons from the air. Severe fires will also add large amounts of particulate into our atmosphere. If we want a cleaner environment, then good forest management is essential.

Tester's biggest minefield is 45 years of federal legislation. The National Forest Mangement Act was the start of federal control. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, then added the Columbia River Basin Rulings, the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Protection Act, Clinton's Roadless Initiative, and the Freedom of Justice Act.

We have now taken the management of the forests from the USFS to the court room. We now expect federal judges not only to be experts in the law, but also the natural sciences. This burden of law and science has cost taxpayers billions of dollars. Even though forests are public lands, the court decides what uses are allowed.

Tester has gone where no one has been willing to tread since Pat Williams in the 1970s in trying to find common ground between forest uses and wilderness. His bill has only begun its journey and it will be both loved and hated. I hope, when the journey is over, there is a consensus satisfying all concerned. I applaud Jon Tester for his leadership and his Montana values.

The stalemates must end in order to serve the best interests of the public. The courts cannot solve all the issues. We Montanans work, live and play here. Jon Tester needs to know what you believe is best for our state. Contact Tester and tell him what you think. I thank Tester for all of his efforts.

Only a balanced forest bill will fly

Billings Gazette

Editorial

December 30, 2009

Since Sen. Jon Tester introduced his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act in July, it has been praised as the first legislation in two decades to bring Montana wilderness advocates and logging advocates together. It also

has been criticized by people on both sides of the public-lands debate who want more or less than the proposal would provide.

The bill, which deals exclusively with portions of national forests in Western Montana, had a Senate Energy Committee hearing earlier this month.

This week, Denny Rehberg announced that he will hold a series of public meetings in five Western Montana towns next week to find out what Montanans think of Tester's bill. The state's lone U.S. representative said he hasn't made up his mind on that Senate bill and may introduce his own bill.

Talking to constituents

It's important for members of Montana's congressional delegation to communicate with their constituents. Tester held nine public meetings before introducing the legislation, which he said is the result of years of comments from industry, environmentalists and local governments. Tester has said that many of the ideas in his bill were fashioned in negotiations that began between various interest groups even before he was elected to the U.S. Senate.

If the amount of public land the legislation designates for logging were reduced as some critics want or the wilderness designation was cut as other critics want, would this bill still be viable?

At the Senate hearing, Tester posed that question to a conservationist and a sawmill operator who both supported his bill. Their answer was unequivocal: "You split this bill up and neither will support it," Tester said in a recent interview with *The Gazette*.

Representatives of the U.S. Forest Service testified to their concerns about Tester's bill setting bad precedents because of the details it prescribes for managing specific lands in national forests. For example, it would require seven times as much logging annually on the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest as has been average.

"I think this is a good precedent," Tester told *The Gazette*. "Our forests have changed and our policy hasn't changed. ... We've got dead forests that are going to burn. The legislation could reduce firefighting costs by treating the forests for hazardous-fuel reduction."

A few revisions

Tester said he is proposing a few revisions to his original bill. For example, areas that it designates for snowmobile use would be open to snowmobiles in the same way they are now, instead of restricting the machines to trails.

"The folks who have been fighting this stuff for many years haven't solved anything," Tester said. "This is a reasonable bill — an opportunity to do something in the forest and help the Forest Service be successful. I also think the wilderness component is reasonable."

The next step for the forest bill is Energy Committee action to amend, approve or reject the bill. Tester said he will push for committee to take it up early in the new year.

Public-lands legislation is always imbued with controversy in Montana. Nobody will get everything he wants. Only with broad public support and strong congressional leadership for a balanced compromise will Montana ever get a forest bill that becomes law.

Let Rehberg know what you think

Helena Independent Record

Editorial

December 29, 2009

It's a positive step for Rep. Denny Rehberg to get out in Montana to hear public comment on Sen. Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, and we urge the Congressman to pay more attention to his constituents than the fringe groups claiming they had no voice in the development of the fundamentally sound, compromise bill.

Rehberg announced late last week a series of five listening sessions Jan. 4-8 that are free and open to the public to hear people's thoughts on Tester's bill, which as of yet, Rehberg has not indicated if he will support. Though he conducted no listening sessions to do so, Sen. Max Baucus is supporting Tester's bill.

The bill, which had its first Senate subcommittee floor hearing Dec. 17, would create more than 600,000 acres of wilderness in Montana. The last wilderness designation here was more than 25 years ago in 1983. Most of the 600,000 acres would be in southwestern Montana's Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The bill also calls for opening up 70,000 acres in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge to logging over the next decade — a small slice compared to the 4 million acres in that forest.

The aim is to provide a steady source of timber for the state's ailing logging industry following a string of recent mill closures.

More than 330,000 acres would go to establish new recreation, protective or special management areas. For the most part, they simply protect current motorized use or other recreation.

Tester has promoted the bill as a "compromise" piece of legislation that environmentalists, recreationists and loggers all had a hand in crafting. In the first Senate hearing, Agriculture Department undersecretary Harris Sherman said he was concerned about the bill's cost and mandates for logging. He said the 70,000 acres in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge are "not reasonable" and may be unachievable.

In a telephone interview with the Independent Record last week, Tester said despite those concerns he was encouraged by the hearing.

"We're certainly not naive that we still have some work to do," he said. "It's a work in progress. We're talking a 4 million-acre forest ... and we're talking about going in and logging 70,000 acres. That's not an extraordinary amount of logging."

That amount of logging, Tester said, would promote forest health and could potentially offset the nearly \$3 billion the Forest Service is using to fight forest fires.

"This bill was made on collaboration," he said. "It's all about stewardship."

When talking about wilderness, "stewardship," of course, is akin to political purgatory. Since the Wilderness Act of 1964 designated 9.1 million acres in the West as official wilderness, other "projected" wilderness designations have sat in limbo.

Congress has failed to appropriately designate the uses of some 60 million more acres suitable to wilderness. All the while, user groups like ATVerers and mountain bikers have grown accustomed to pushing deeper into their boundaries, making it harder to give it up as official wilderness.

In all great compromises, something must be given up for something to be gained. And that's just what Tester's bill has the potential to do: unlock a heavyweight wrestling stalemate and potentially establish a new political arena in which to define logging, wilderness and recreation.

Groups on the extreme left and right might never support the bill, or any for that matter, but it appears many mainstream groups do. With Rehberg's listening tour, he'll likely hear as much.

"I need to hear from people," Rehberg said Monday in a teleconference with news reporters. "Does this piece of legislation get us to what we want our forests to look like, what we want our Bureau of Land management property to look like, or does it just do more of the same?"

"As Montanans, the land we live on is our most valuable resource," Rehberg said in a news release. "The question isn't whether it's worth protecting, but how we can best do that. The one-size-fits-all approach of federal management doesn't always work, and I want to listen to the folks on the ground before deciding whether I can support any proposal to expand wilderness."

Just like Tester did.

If Rehberg hears support for the bill — even despite some flaws that need to be ironed out — it's our hope he will support it and help unlock the political stalemate currently choking off any progress.

Forest bill a win-win situation

Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Editorial

December 20, 2009

Montana Sen. Jon Tester's "Forest Jobs and Recreation Act" may not have the word "wilderness" in its title, but it's proving to be just as much of a lightning rod as any that have included that word in the past.

Tester's bill is the result of an unprecedented compromise crafted by a coalition of industry and environmental interests. It would set aside some 677,000 acres of land as wilderness — mostly in Southwest Montana — while mandating logging on some 7,000 acres of Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest land per year for the next 10 years.

One of the wilderness set-asides, a 4,465-acre chunk that sits in Montana but is heavily used by snowmobilers coming from the Idaho side of the mountain, is drawing opposition from Idahoans who use the area or are dependent on tourists who come to Idaho to use the area.

Opposition to the entire bill is coming from some environmental groups who decry the bill's timbercutting requirements. And representatives of the Obama administration are concerned that cutting timber on a scale required by the bill will cost the Forest Service millions in administrative costs.

Anyone who has a stake in this historic agreement should be heard in the Senate hearings that began last week. And the bill could need some tweaking to make it better. But the critics must not be allowed to scuttle this effort.

Tester's bill offers the first chance in decades to resolve the fate of a substantial portion of Montana's roadless lands. That's important given the dwindling amounts of unroaded land left in the United States. It's also important because putting timber-cutting requirements into law could forestall much of the costly

litigation that ties up Forest Service timber sales the forest products industry needs to keep Montanans working.

The bill has a chance for passage because significant players on both sides of the issue have worked out the details and buy into the plan. And, if it succeeds, it could serve as a template for resolving the fate of other roadless lands in Montana and other states, while providing some badly needed timber for the industry.

Congress must work on the details, as it always does, but, in the end, this bill deserves passage and the president's signature.

Standard View: Culture change does not come easy

Montana Standard

Editorial

December 17, 2009

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., is remarkably unfazed that a high-ranking federal official expressed serious concerns about his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

At the bill's first committee hearing in Washington Dec. 17, Agriculture Department Undersecretary Harris Sherman balked at a main provision of the bill that mandates logging or thinning on 7,000 acres of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest every year for the next 10 years.

Sherman, who oversees the Forest Service, said the plan was "not reasonable" and called on the senator to "alter or remove highly site-specific requirements." Was Sherman's testimony a game changer?

Not at all, Tester told The Standard during a phone interview last week. He "absolutely" thinks the bill still has a good chance of passing despite Sherman's opinion and said he knows of USDA officials above him who support the bill along with many rank and file Forest Service employees who agree it's time for a fundamental change in how the agency manages our national forests.

Is the senator even slightly inclined to take another look at the acreage mandates?

Not even slightly, Tester said, and neither are the original parties who forged the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership upon which the bill is based in part. In a national forest where 1.9 million acres have been identified as suitable for timber activity, surely the agency can find 70,000 over the next decade that can be cut.

"They can do this," Tester said. It will be a stretch, he acknowledged, and it won't fit nicely into the templates the agency is used to following, but it can be done. "We're here to help set policy," he said.

Whether or not you support this legislation, you can't help but admire the senator for standing firmly behind his Montana constituents who spent years hammering out the tough compromises on logging, wilderness and recreation areas that are contained in this bill.

He said it would be "unfair" at this point to start picking the agreements apart after so much work went into putting them together, and we tend to agree that now is not the time to start backtracking.

The 7,000-acre annual mandate does not mean all-out clear-cutting on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge. Broad landscapes would be carefully considered, with priority given to reducing wildfire risk in the wildland-

urban interface regions and managing beetle-killed timber. Treatment would include thinning in some areas and removing conifers that are encroaching on natural meadows and aspen groves in others.

Remember, the whole thrust of this bill is to finally break the wilderness-versus-logging gridlock that has paralyzed forest management for decades and lies at the heart of why 7,000 acres annually is virtually unprecedented.

Tester said he didn't expect Sherman's strong testimony against the bill, but perhaps he should have. This proposed legislation is unprecedented, combining logging mandates with wilderness and recreation area designations, and it would launch a brand new chapter in national forest management. Keepers of the status quo rarely embrace radical change.

Increasingly, lawmakers in western states are recognizing the urgent need for a new management style, however, and they're taking cues from grassroots collaborative efforts. U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., recently introduced a bill strikingly similar to Tester's that would guide forest management in eastern Oregon. Tester said Sens. James Risch, R-Idaho, and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., are considering bills, too.

As for his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, Tester said the next goal is to get it moved out of committee and on to the Senate floor for a vote. Let's hope he can accomplish that early next year, as the health care debate winds down. The sooner the better, for Montana's ailing timber industry and wilderness advocates alike.

Tester forest bill a good deal for Montana

Billings Gazette

Shane Colton

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission Chairman

December 5, 2009

Montana has long been famous for its blue-ribbon trout streams, premier hunting and access opportunities for the public. For most Montana families, hunting and fishing on public lands and waterways is an important part of their outdoor heritage.

Our way of life here is unique, and people from around the world come to experience what we enjoy in our backyards.

But we're not immune to the impacts of growth and development that can pose threats to our prized fish and game habitat. And there are those who make their living in the woods or in sawmills who will be quick to tell you about the stagnant management that has plagued our forests and agencies for decades.

Because of conflicts among various user groups, forest management has been at a virtual standstill for years. Our forests become more and more susceptible to catastrophic wildfire each year. Hunters and anglers looking for permanent protection in some of their favorite hunting and fishing spots have been left disappointed. Meanwhile, mills have closed and jobs have been lost due to lack of timber harvests on public lands.

What needs to be done

Montanans who recreate on and make their living from our public lands know best what needs to be done. That's why Sen. Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, a Montana-made solution, should get the support of Congress. Montanans of all kinds — from hunters and anglers to loggers and conservationists to

ATV users and mountain bikers — helped create this bill. With such a diverse group working together, it's no wonder that 7 in 10 people throughout the state support the bill.

We know a good deal when we see one. In the years to come, it will be fascinating to reflect on how hunters, anglers and conservationists helped save the timber industry, and how the industry helped to permanently protect some of Montana's prized backcountry fish and game habitat.

As a hunter, angler, and a Fish, Wildlife and Parks commissioner, one of my top priorities is to ensure future generations of Montanans will have access to the same outdoor opportunities that I've had my whole life. Additionally, the stewardship component of this bill is very important for the future of fish and wildlife habitat.

Creating jobs

Some of the funds generated from timber harvest will be put into forest restoration. Stewardship projects could include improving fish passage so native trout can navigate to their spawning grounds and will be able to thrive far into the future. These restoration projects—along with community-designed timber projects—will create more jobs for Montanans and give the timber industry a much-needed boost.

Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act gives us the opportunity to take control of what happens to our public lands. Tester shares an important Montana value with most of us: keeping public lands in public hands. This bill brings Montanans together and lets us determine our own future.

As an outdoorsman deeply committed both personally and professionally to our public lands, I am proud to support the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and what it will do for Montana jobs, land management, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Forest Jobs Act embodies what Montanans value most

Great Falls Tribune

Gerry Jennings

Montana Wilderness Association Island Range Chapter president

November 23, 2009

As a Montanan, I feel lucky to live in a state where everyone is a neighbor and no one is too busy to lend a hand. As a Montanan deeply committed to conservation, I am also lucky to live in a state that not only has spectacular wildlands, but also has a legacy of protecting those wild places.

Sadly, for the past two decades, both our tradition of cooperation and our legacy of wildland protection have been at a stalemate due to conflicts over forest management.

With each year, conflict has grown more heated and more divisive, our forests have grown redder and Montanan's wildlands continue to be unprotected.

For the last couple years, local community groups have been trying to bridge the gap on conflicts over public lands management. These local collaborative efforts have been unceasing and are producing solutions that work for everyone—everyone, that is, who is willing to move beyond gridlock.

Now, Sen. Jon Tester has introduced legislation that Montanans of all stripes — loggers, conservationists, sportsmen, mountain bikers, and motorized users — can support.

Sen. Tester and the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act have brought Montana to a place where we can be neighbors again, a place where all of Montana's future generations will be able to enjoy our magnificent wildlands as they now stand.

This bill, however, has not been met without protest. One critic, Paul Edwards, brings up some points that I feel obligated to address.

First, Paul refers to Sen. Tester's bill as a "bailout" whose effects would be "negligible."

In an era that will be remembered for its economic instability and high unemployment rate, legislation that will secure jobs and create even more speaks for itself.

Additionally, the effect that these jobs will have on survival of rural economies is anything but negligible. Hundreds and hundreds of Montana's families rely on timber industry jobs.

We are not talking simply about numbers or facts on a piece of paper; we are talking about real families and communities. The livelihoods of our Montana neighbors are anything but negligible.

As far as the integrity of the conservation component of this bill, I have no doubt that it continues in the legacy that leaders like Lee Metcalf could support.

That's why some of Montana's leading wilderness advocates, such as former U.S. Rep. Pat Williams, strongly support the bill.

What we are gaining from this bill far outweighs anything that another 25 years of empty gridlock could give us.

Nearly 700,000 acres will be protected — more than half the size of Montana's first designated wilderness, the Bob Marshall. These landscapes will forever stand as they do today.

With our foresight, future generations of Montanans will experience the same beauty, grandeur and solitude that we enjoy today.

Paul is right about one thing: In Montana, and in the West for that matter, we hold certain mythologies.

One of these is the idea that there exists boundless, untamed, undeveloped, and untouched land. The land, the value of which stretches far beyond the symbolic, helps us define who we are as Montanans and why we live in such a place.

Montana is home to magnificent landscapes and wild open spaces. But it's not boundless, and we must not take it for granted. These landscapes will not be the pristine wildlands they are today unless we protect them.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act grasps the spirit of what Montanans value most: working together neighbor to neighbor to protect both the economic viability of rural communities and our treasured wild places.

How lucky we are!

Forty years is long enough
Montana Standard
Dave Lewis
Montana Senator District 42
November 17, 2009

In 1969 I was working for the Forest Service and was sent to Dillon to be the budget officer on the Beaverhead National Forest. My wife fell in love with the town immediately and the fishing was and is the best. There was even a sawmill with jobs! What could go wrong?

Suddenly the peace and quiet was broken. The forest became embroiled almost immediately in a Forest Resource Planning effort that turned into a rock fight between wilderness advocates and those who believed in timber management, including logging. Forty years ago and I can still remember meetings that went nowhere.

Let's jump forward to 1988-89 and Congress was considering a wilderness bill proposed by Pat Williams. Williams was quoted in The Montana Standard in July saying that if a compromise bill could not be passed, "it could mean the closing of lumber mills." The Montana Wildlands Coalition said it would prefer to "see no new Montana Wilderness Bill rather than one as limited as Williams' Bill." This was 1988. Nothing happened.

Twenty years later, in 2009, we have seen mills close and over-mature stands of timber burn. We have managed to get the worst of both worlds. When the timber industry and some major conservation groups reached a compromise on a bill which would settle this dispute this year, I was amazed. I never expected to live long enough to see it happen. Now we have another rock fight with opposition from other preservation and some multiple use groups.

I am reading the same rhetoric from groups that have been fighting this for more than 40 years. The timber industry is desperately trying to survive. We are going to have to look at new products such as power production and innovative ways of producing old products for them to make it. This is going to require access to some of the area that has been locked up for so long.

Opposition groups need to recognize that rather than letting the timber die and burn in catastrophic fires, we can utilize it to create good-paying jobs and preserve the infrastructure we still have. They have to compromise and they have a vehicle to do that in the bill that Sens. Jon Tester and Max Baucus are sponsoring.

Our first great grandchild will be born this winter. I would like her to be able to live where there are at least a few jobs and some wilderness to be enjoyed. Let's pass this bill for the next generations and not wait another 40 years to make it happen. It is time!

Time is right for Tester forest bill
Montana Standard
Editorial
November 14, 2009

Montana's remaining timber mills are struggling to survive right now, while the mountain pine beetle thrives. The dilemma demands action — to preserve what's left of the state's logging infrastructure, to harvest infested trees while they still have value, to reduce wildfire risk for communities near forest lands.

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester recognized this critical need for action and responded accordingly, by introducing a bill unlike any other to come before our nation's Congress. The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is not just a bill that mandates logging — it creates wilderness and recreation areas, too — but the sense of urgency behind it stems from the depressed state of our forests and our timber industry. Both need major transfusions.

Sensing the need for drastic measures, coalitions in three different parts of western Montana came together in recent years to attempt the difficult task of compromise. Three goals emerged: to preserve more of Montana's wild lands, to designate areas most suitable for timber harvest, and to create permanent recreation areas for mountain bikes, snowmobiles, ATV's.

Independent of one another, the coalitions approached Tester — the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project and the Three Rivers Challenge. He combined their plans into one bill and then set about gathering yet more input from Montanans on what should be in the bill and where the various borders should be drawn.

The gathering continues. Tester asked for specific feedback at Thursday's open house in Butte, just as he has at similar functions around the state. The chance for him to incorporate additional changes will come after the bill's initial hearing, which hasn't yet been scheduled.

One change outside Butte will allow limited helicopter landings in the proposed Highlands wilderness area. This exemption was made so that The Peak's Rod Alne may continue to provide high-altitude military training and is a good example of Tester's willingness to listen and respond to local interests.

The Standard's editorial board is unanimously in support of this bill. We like that it's a Montana-made solution to longstanding forest management conflicts. We like the stewardship-based approach to logging in which proceeds from timber sales will be channeled back into forest restoration projects, creating yet more jobs and improving habitat. We share Tester's hope that this unique model becomes a template for compromise solutions in other western states.

No one group is totally satisfied, which tells us the bill strikes an effective balance. Wilderness advocates want more; timber interests want more; motorized recreationists want more. Fortunately, our forests are big enough to accommodate all of these competing interests. As Mick Jagger reminds us, "You can't always get what you want," but sometimes "you get what you need." Montana needs this bill right now. It may represent our timber industry's last best hope for survival. It would also reassure the rest of the nation that Montana recognizes its duty to preserve our most beautiful, pristine places, not just for ourselves but on behalf of all Americans and future generations. A major federal wilderness bill was passed last year, but not an acre of Big Sky Country was included. If we refuse to make our own wilderness decisions, out-of-state interests will push hard to do the job for us, as Sun Mountain Lumber's Sherm Anderson said Thursday.

And although motorized recreationists have been among the most vocal critics, Tester pointed out that only 22 miles of road and 26 miles of trail would be closed in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge under the act. That's fewer miles than would be closed under the Forest Service's proposed management plan. Still open would be 5,679 miles of road and 1,057 miles of trail.

We applaud Sen. Max Baucus for recently signing on as a co-sponsor to this bill and hope that Rep. Denny Rehberg lends his support once it moves to the House. Prominent Republicans who have already endorsed it include former governor Marc Racicot and former secretary of state Bob Brown.

With Montanans united behind it, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act should have a good chance of passing, hopefully without many riders attached. We wish Tester success as he attempts to wrangle it through in the coming months. Maybe he can sneak it in right after health care and right before energy policy.

Tester bill creates jobs, protects forest

Missoulian

Editorial

November 1, 2009

Montana has waited for nearly 30 years for new wilderness with nothing yet to show for it. When the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act passed in March, not a single acre of the 2 million acres newly designated as wilderness was located in Montana.

Meanwhile, Montanans have watched as our timber industry has dwindled to a bare skeleton of what it used to be, and in recent years, the nationwide decline in housing construction that hastened the shuttering of several western Montana mills.

Yet we haven't spent the last three decades sitting on our hands. Many individuals and groups too numerous to name here have worked hard to make sure Montana's interest in our most treasured public lands and in the forest products industry that still provides good-paying jobs has not gone ignored.

The folks behind the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership, the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Project and the Three Rivers Challenge, in particular, helped further a relatively new approach to overcoming Montana's unique forest management challenges: collaboration. Conservation groups, timber interests, government officials, landowners and many, many more had a hand in shaping the drafts of federal legislation ultimately offered to Montana's congressional delegation.

On July 20, one of those delegates - Sen. Jon Tester - officially introduced S1470, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009, which has been referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The bill still has a long way to go, and some significant obstacles to overcome, before it reaches the president's desk. Remember, most bills meet their deaths in committee.

But with enough support from Montanans, Tester's bill could survive to become a living example of how the spirit of collaboration can result in meaningful, lasting solutions.

In the three months since he introduced the bill, Tester has held multiple meetings open to the public to exchange information and ideas about the bill. He's opted to give a presentation and then set aside time for one-on-one questions. He's doing it this way, he says, because it allows more people to be heard, including people who don't necessarily want to speak in front of a crowd. And it prevents the kind of grandstanding that some have come to count on in order to disrupt these sorts of meetings.

"A lot of folks who are complaining don't want to talk to me, they want to talk to the crowd," Tester told the Missoulian's editorial board last week.

Tester was in Missoula last week, shortly before flying back to Washington, D.C., to hold just such a discussion. About 150 people came to the Doubletree Hotel last Monday. And he announced that the act has earned the official support of Montana's other senator, Max Baucus, who has signed on as a co-sponsor. Rep. Denny Rehberg has yet to announce his official position.

Because any future public hearings are not likely to take place in Montana, this was many Montanans' one shot to give their in-person input on the bill - but it's not necessarily the final chance at having a say. Tester says he remains open to feedback from Montanans, and in fact, the feedback he's already gathered during his meetings around the state has led to several slight adjustments to the legislation.

We would like to offer one more: Any bill that is passed should include a preference for Montana-based companies and workers, to ensure that any logging or forest work performed goes to benefit the businesses the bill's logging requirement is intended to help.

For instance, the bill outlines more than 500,000 acres of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest to be designated as wilderness, while also making sure the U.S. Forest Service logs a minimum of 7,000 acres a year for 10 years. The bill also includes parts of the Blackfoot-Clearwater area around the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wilderness, and the Kootenai National Forest in northwestern Montana.

This groundbreaking legislation, while not perfect, can only improve with more input from Montanans. As it is, it meets the immediate needs of every Montanan who cares about protecting our public lands for future generations while also making sure our remaining mills stay in business in the years to come.

And that's why we fully support the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, and urge Congress to consider and approve this bill as soon as possible. Montana should not have to wait another 30 years for more wilderness.

Public meeting etiquette

Montana Standard

Editorial

September 29, 2009

When letters and phone calls started trickling in about Sen. Jon Tester's Saturday forest bill meeting in Dillon, we decided to investigate.

Tester behaved badly, according to his critics. He stayed only long enough to sing the praises of his Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, refused to take comments from the crowd and then hightailed it to Helena for seemingly more important pursuits — the coin toss at the Carroll-Western football game.

"Tsk tsk," we thought after listening to a voicemail. "What was the senator thinking?" Then we called Tester spokes-person Aaron Murphy and heard a whole different story.

"Everyone who wanted an opportunity to speak with Jon had an opportunity," Murphy said. "The Dillon event was billed to run from 9 to 10:30 a.m. The senator left the auditorium at 10:45." True, Tester did fly to Helena in time to launch the big game. And true, the floor was not opened up to comments after the presentations ended. But people had ample opportunity to ask questions and voice opinions, according to Murphy.

He explained that they chose a format that would allow more people to have one-on-one contact with Tester or his staff. The senator and three staffers were available up front following the presentations to field questions and hear people out, rather than have just one open mike for a crowd approaching 400.

"We chose that in the interest of getting more input, not less, of allowing more questions, not fewer," Murphy explained, adding that the same format was successfully used at Monday's meeting in Bozeman.

"It was an effective process and we plan to use it in the future," he said.

We can see why those who may have wanted to cause a scene by publicly railing against the bill would have been disappointed by this format. They lost their chance to be in the limelight and try to get the crowd all worked up. Spectators who turned out mainly to catch the political fireworks would have been disappointed, too. Watching people form lines to ask questions or proffer comments isn't very exciting.

But it sounds as if the people who sincerely wanted to share their views with the senator or ask questions of the bill had the chance, and that's what's most important here — the civil give-and-take of democracy.

Tester has contended all along that introducing this bill represents the beginning of the dialogue with constituents, not the end. Murphy said there's definitely room to make adjustments and all the feedback from these first two meetings will be "duly noted," with more meetings yet to come.

The senator is attempting something new here — the first Montana wilderness bill in decades, coupled with a federal mandate to log a certain acreage every year — and that's bound to create strong feelings on all sides.

Those feelings deserve to be freely expressed, and Tester has an obligation to carefully consider them. The process is unfolding as it should.

Tester's bill can break logjam on forest policy

Billings Gazette

Marc Racicot

Former Montana Governor

September 13, 2009

I was blessed to be born in northwestern Montana and to grow up in the middle of the majestic and towering forests surrounding Libby. I loved those trees then and, like so many Americans, I love them even more now. My ancestors were involved with logging for a very long time, starting with my grandfather, a logging camp cook who came to Montana with a timber company from Minnesota early on in the last century before the advent of logging trucks.

I have been deeply saddened for a long time by the condition of our Western forests and the catastrophic damage, in the form of disease, wildfires, destruction of wildlife habitat and the degradation of water quality and fisheries, that constantly threatens and all too frequently destroys them.

I'm confident I'm not unlike everyone who cares deeply about the quality of life and natural environment we share in Montana.

For a quarter-century, while I served in government, I was close to the debates and decisions at the state and national level that focused on exactly the same issues and exactly the same arguments one can observe today. By any measure of movement or accomplishment, we have not achieved nearly enough in that period of time to even mitigate, much less obviate, the possibilities for calamity in our forests. While we have debated and litigated, the degradation and damage has continued to surreptitiously creep through our landscapes. It is the modern-day equivalent of Nero fiddling while Rome burns.

That's why I've been heartened by and grateful for the efforts of those diverse interests and groups who have worked hard and long over several years to design three community-based forest projects that have now become embodied in federal legislation, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, sponsored by Sen. Jon Tester. Like all of our human affairs, the legislation may not be perfect, but it is a thoughtful and sensitive attempt to start doing something serious and meaningful about the health of our forest ecosystems and the diverse interests that revere and depend upon them. Resting upon a strong, broad-based desire to do something more than "fiddle" while our forests burned, the community-based initiatives and Sen. Tester's legislation reflect a careful balance of interests and imperatives that each deserve consideration in the management of our forest landscapes.

My sincere hope is that the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act will be acted upon by Congress without delay and that we can sooner, rather than later, begin a new day in forest management and stewardship of our natural treasures.

Tester steers toward middle-of-road land bill

Billings Gazette

Editorial

August 5, 2009

The Montana map on Jon Tester's forestry bill Web page ends just east of Bozeman and Great Falls. It shows that this isn't a bill to end all wilderness bills. It wouldn't decide forever the decades-old argument of whether Montana has too much or too little public land protected from roads, motorized use and development.

However, Senate Bill 1470 is the first effort in a generation to set aside Montana wilderness and also the first effort to combine forest conservation and logging. By calling the bill "Forest Jobs and Recreation Act," Tester even avoided that controversial W word.

Pragmatic approach

The bill is a pragmatic approach that proposes managing federal lands according to the specific attributes, values and needs of a particular area. Thus, the Jobs and Rec Act is really three bills in one, based on separate areas of federal lands with input by people who know and use those lands for a myriad of purposes such as hiking, hunting, outfitting, logging, off-roading and snowmobiling.

As previously reported in The Gazette, Tester's legislation garnered support and input from a variety of Montanans including, but not limited to: Montana Wilderness Association, Montana and National Wildlife Federations, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Wilderness Society, Troy Snowmobile Club, Pyramid Lumber in Seeley Lake, Rosebud Forest Products in Missoula, Sun Mountain Lumber in Deer Lodge and Kootenai Ridge Riders ATV Club.

Tester and his staff received input from dozens of organizations, met with interested citizens and held public listening sessions. All the senator's meetings were listed on his Web schedule, according to Tester spokesman Patrick Devlin.

"There's never been a request for a meeting (on this issue) that we turned down," Devlin said.

'Home-grown solution'

Tester touts his bill as "a smart, home-grown solution." Of course, there are critics who want a much larger area designated wilderness as proposed in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. And others oppose virtually any new wilderness designation.

Tester staked out middle ground and found a lot of company there. His bill has a long road ahead before it can get Barack Obama's signature. But it's a cinch that a bill proposing an extremist position won't become law. Because he started with grass roots, his Jobs and Rec Act has the best chance of growing into a successful public-lands law.

As described by Missoulian reporter Michael Jamison in Monday's Gazette, proposals for the three areas addressed in Tester's bill involved discussions and relationships that predate Tester's term. Tim Baker of the Montana Wilderness Association recalled a timber summit organized by former Sen. Conrad Burns at which Burns told Baker and a logging company representative that they ought to work together because they weren't that far apart in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. In the Seeley Lake area, varied interests already had a track record of working together for shared interests, like clean water. In the Yaak Valley, a neighbor brought other neighbors together.

"There is a yearning for this type of approach out there. People are really tired of shouting at each other," Bruce Farling, executive director of Montana Trout Unlimited, told The Gazette State Bureau recently.

Let's keep talking about this legislation.

Montana forests suffer from beetles, political stalemate

Billings Gazette

Bob Brown

Mansfield Center at University of Montana

August 5, 2009

My friends from Norway were astounded a few years ago as we drove through the forests of Western Montana. Their shock was at the waste they saw. In Europe, timberland is intensively managed for the sustained use of forest resources. What is not milled into building material becomes biofuel for heating and electrical generation. There are almost no forest fires in Europe because there is no jungle of combustible material helter-skelter across the landscape, and no massive insect infestations.

With the vastness of our public domain we Americans enjoy our magnificent wildlands in a way Europeans cannot. For doing so, we pay a price. Today, 3 million acres of our national forests are dead or dying from the pine beetle, and next year the number of acres is projected to go as high as 6 million. The infestation won't grow endlessly, of course, because the more bug-killed forests the more catastrophic the inevitable fires will be. The Forest and Jobs Recreation Act recently introduced by Sen. John Tester is the first serious effort in nearly two decades to address Montana's out-of-control forests.

As I grew up in the fir and larch country of Northwest Montana, perhaps my first recollection of a public policy issue was the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960. The concept was simple and sensible: If timber is not harvested at a faster rate than it can regenerate it can be used forever. Traditional harvest practices are generally compatible with grazing, recreation and wildlife propagation. Good, sustainable jobs are created, and managed forests are healthier and less susceptible to forest fires.

Forest standoff

Sadly, by the 1980s greed complicated the balanced concept of multiple use and sustained yield. The amount of timber that could be harvested each year, the "allowable cut," was based on the tree-growing capacity of the forest land. Creation of wilderness removed land from the timber base, and so reduced the calculated allowable cut. Therefore, the timber industry opposed any new wilderness.

At about this same time industry began to adopt harvest practices based on "even age management." That is the euphemism for clear cutting. The public became alarmed when vast mountainsides were denuded of timber on a scale unimagined at the time of the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act. Clear cutting appeared to be a single use of the forest land.

In the ensuing wave of litigation between the environmentalists and the timber industry, the lawyers stumped the loggers every time.

Harvest shrinks

In 1987, over 600 million board feet of timber was harvested from Montana's national forests. In 2007, the number from the same lands was 87 million. Since 1990, 22 Montana sawmills have closed, starving for lack of timber while surrounded by an ocean of it, tied up in litigation and growing up in stagnation and infestation.

For nearly two decades, Montana politicians have kept their distance from the controversial forest issue. It has been the big wet dog of Montana politics. Now, to his credit, Tester has shown some leadership. His bill will create 700,000 acres of wilderness in areas well suited for it, and it will guarantee timber harvest at an easily sustainable level of 10,000 acres a year.

Tester's bill won't prevent the catastrophic fires that now must result from many years of litigation and neglect. It is too late for that. But late is better than never, and if the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act becomes law it may lead to other balanced and farsighted legislation addressing the rest of Montana's festering forest lands.

Tester forest bill touches nerve

Helena Independent Record

Editorial

July 26, 2009

It's a wilderness bill. It's a logging bill. It's a jobs bill. It's enlightened natural resource policy. It's an environmental train wreck.

That's a brief summary of the wide reaction to the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act officially unveiled a week or so ago by Montana Sen. Jon Tester.

While trying to accurately label Tester's bill is probably pointless, it is clear that the proposal is a step in the right direction in terms of managing Montana's forests and wild lands.

Here are some of the highlights of the 84-page proposal from the Montana Democrat: It adds about 680,000 acres of wilderness in three western and southwest Montana forests. It requires the Forest Service to harvest at least 100,000 acres of timber over the next 10 years. It releases 76,000 acres of land under consideration for wilderness to more active management, which could include timber harvest and recreational use. It allows for added ATV and snowmobile access in several areas.

But the real highlight of the proposal is that it represents a lot of work by very diverse groups to come up with a plan to end the stalemate over wilderness and management of big chunks of forest in Montana. Along with the usual suspects in such legislation, groups like the Montana Wilderness Association, Trout Unlimited and the Montana Wildlife Federation, the proposal has gained the backing of a number of lumber mill and logging operators, ATV groups and others not usually found at the wilderness table.

The proposal is really the result of Montana people talking to Montana people about coming up with ideas that work in the complicated world we live in. It is encouraging that we are still able to sit down and seek common ground and solutions to complex challenges.

Of course, there is already plenty of debate taking place about Tester's proposal. Hard-core wilderness advocates complain that not nearly enough land will receive protection and too many concessions are made to timber interests.

On the other side of the fence, a "multiple-use" advocate has claimed the bill is only about wilderness and "is nothing but a slap in the face to the logging industry."

The most curious comments have come from environmentalist types who claimed that the proposal's mandates for timber harvest would take management decisions out of the hands of the trained professionals with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Apparently, endless lawsuits and appeals over management plans and timber sales don't tie the hands of those trained professionals.

There will be plenty of time for debate about the details in Tester's proposal. It must pass the Senate and House of Representatives and gain the signature of President Obama. As we all are aware, the potential for significant tinkering is quite high in any measure that lands before Congress.

By no means is the Tester bill a perfect proposal. There is a shortage of detail about how the measure will actually create jobs, for instance. And it doesn't address forest management questions in several key areas, including the Rocky Mountain Front.

And it would be nice to hear some meaningful comment on this proposal from Sen. Max Baucus and Rep. Denny Rehberg. They each have an obligation to share their views on this important topic and have yet to do so in any substantial manner.

As smoke from forest fires begins to fill our summer air and talk about red, beetle-killed trees dominates many conversations, a proposal that brings the management of our forests to the forefront is welcome.

The fact that that proposal draws on the views of a wide range of Montanans makes it worthy of serious discussion, both in Montana and in Washington, D.C.

Wilderness bill protects heritage, jobs

Missoulian

Pat Williams

University of Montana professor, former U.S. Representative

July 26, 2009

Sen. Jon Tester, with the announcement of his public land legislation, is reclaiming Montana's pride in our long history of protecting the land through legislation.

For more than a century, Montanans have worked to maintain this state as a hunting and fishing paradise. From the late 1800s, our state legislatures have created land set-asides and passed fishing and hunting laws that provided significant benefits to both ample game and prime recreation. During the nation's environmental renaissance of the 1960s, Montana led the way with our own landmark state laws to protect our air and water and to determine appropriate siting of industrial plants.

Forty-five years ago, Montana U.S. Sen. James Murray and Rep. Lee Metcalf were among the original sponsors of America's Wilderness Act, assuring that the first to be protected was Montana's Bob Marshall. During the three decades that followed the designation of the Bob, our state's congressional delegation had been in the forefront of protecting Montana's and America's most pristine wildlife habitat and fish spawning grounds.

Then came a legislative drought. Montana has not successfully guided a wildlands preservation bill through the U.S. House and Senate in 20 years. We haven't even tried for a decade and a half.

Sen. Jon Tester is attempting to regain Montana's historic position as a leader in the long effort to preserve our natural heritage and maintain this last best place for fishing, hunting and camping. And more n the Tester legislation marks the first time in Montana's history that congressional legislation combines the ultimate in land protection with the effort to statutorily prescribe some job assurances for the state's timber industry.

Montana's logging and milling operations have been barely hanging on by the bark. A decade ago, many understood that the industry's heydays in Montana had ended. For better or worse, timber's once major contributions to our economy are much diminished. Lack of demand for wood, low prices, foreign imports and, to some degree, lack of supply have combined to turn the marketplace into timber's enemy.

And yet mills and logging are still vital to a few of our communities. Tester is trying, in the midst of this recession, to help timber through a difficult time. He wisely understands that once the industry shuts down, the infrastructure of mills, equipment, tools and all the rest will be sold off or scrapped. Neither timber jobs nor income are likely to ever return. Once closed down, this industry, like many others, is gone for good.

Together let's move our state back into the forefront of protecting the land while appropriately and carefully encouraging jobs. Tester has provided us the legislative vehicle. Let's get on with it.

Collaboration behind Tester bill should propel it to passage

Great Falls Tribune

Ed Regan

RY Timber

July 23, 2009

Fighting over forests hasn't worked.

If it did, Montana loggers and sawmills would have all the timber we could saw. Environmentalists might have perfectly preserved wilderness as far as the eye could see. Rural communities surrounded by forests could count on a certain and prosperous future — and worry a bit less about the next fire season.

If conflict contributed to conservation and proper forest management, we wouldn't need new federal legislation rewarding communities that take a more collaborative approach to resource management. But it doesn't and we do.

That is why Montana's entire congressional delegation should join in support of Sen. Jon Tester's innovative and exciting legislation, the "Forest Jobs and Recreation Act."

Sen. Tester introduced that new legislation last week. It focuses on common ground staked out by former adversaries who quit fighting about things like wilderness and logging long enough to discover their strong mutual interest in overall forest stewardship.

It turns out that most of us agree on the big picture, even if we differ over some of the details. As participants in these efforts — and as veterans of the long fight over forests — we at RY Timber are convinced Montanans have far more to gain by working together for good forest management and jobs and restoration stewardship and recreation and wilderness protection than by hanging onto an all-or-nothing ideology.

We Montanans have fought fiercely but futilely for the last 30 years over how best to manage the national forests. Look where it's gotten us: Beetles busily kill massive stands of timber while sawmills shut down, and idle workers file for unemployment. Homes and communities face extraordinary and growing risks from wildfires fueled by unhealthy, overgrown forests.

Conflict sustains a status-quo of gridlock in the forests that benefits no one. But we can break the gridlock.

Sen. Tester's bill incorporates collaborative agreements hammered out over several years among diverse, community-based coalitions of industry, conservation and recreation representatives. These agreements focus specifically on long-term management of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in southwestern Montana, the Blackfoot-Clearwater Valley region northeast of Missoula, and the Yaak Valley of Kootenai National Forest in Lincoln County.

Each agreement is tailored to a specific area and circumstances, but each includes common elements:

A commitment to provide a sustainable, dependable supply of timber to local mills — in part by harvesting trees killed by insects and thinning forests where wildfire risk to communities is especially great.

Use of "stewardship contracts" that reinvest revenue generated from timber harvest into conservation projects in the same forest.

Greater emphasis on watershed restoration projects, such as fixing erosion problems filling trout streams with silt.

Designating some special backcountry acreage as federally protected wilderness.

Respecting the rights of people who enjoy using machines like all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles.

These agreements and Tester's bill promote good, balanced management that will serve the interests of Montana. What's more, the bill fosters a model for collaborative, community-based approaches to forest management sorely needed elsewhere.

In their understandable frustration with quarrelling constituents, Montana's political leaders have for years told us that they can't solve our disagreements over forest management — that we should hammer things out among ourselves before asking them to enact a solution.

I will confess to being a late — and initially skeptical — participant in the search for common ground. Once I sat down and began talking with my former adversaries about concrete concerns and specific places, however, my skepticism turned to optimism.

It turns out we don't have to agree on everything and everyplace in order to agree on specific things that will make our forests healthier and communities stronger. It's my belief that the compromises in Sen. Tester's bill give most forest users about 90 percent of what they want. Not bad.

Montana's leaders asked communities to roll up their sleeves and work out their differences.

We've done that in the Three Rivers district of the Kootenai, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, and the Blackfoot-Clearwater. We've found common cause in the health of our forests, in the strength of rural economies and in the high quality of life our forests sustain.

Sen. Tester honors these community-based efforts in his legislation.

Montana's entire congressional delegation now must work together to take the next step — passing the bill Tester introduced into law. Support from other elected leaders surely will help.

After too many years of fighting over forests, Montanans are working through their differences.

We've come a long way, but it's still going to take an act of Congress to prove these collaborative efforts yield more than conflict.

Fighting over forests doesn't work. Finding solutions together does.

Additional Facts

By the numbers

Sen. Tester's "Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009" designates more than 660,000 acres of new wilderness in Montana, while mandating the logging of 100,000 acres on public forests over a 10-year period.

Montana needs forest jobs bill

Montana Standard

Senator Jon Tester

July 18, 2009

It's time to get Montanans back to work in the woods.

It's time to create jobs by ensuring smart timber harvest, by protecting our clean water, and by safeguarding Montana's hunting and fishing habitat — so we can enjoy our unique way of life for generations to come.

And it's time to protect Montana's forest communities from catastrophic wildfire, by thinning dead and dying forests that have fallen victim to pine beetles. Right now, unprecedented numbers of beetle-killed trees are dead, waiting to burn.

The only way we can accomplish a task like that is by working together.

For decades, folks who had different opinions about our forests faced off in a stalemate. But things have changed. They realized they share more values in common than they thought. So, over the past few years, they sat down together to build a better future for Montana's forests and for the folks who rely on them and enjoy them.

After years of hard work, these Montanans brought their ideas to me. I was moved by their ability to set differences aside and focus on a better future for Montana. And, after hearing input from people all across the state, I wrote the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act.

The Forest Jobs Bill is the product of the hard work of Montanans from all walks of life. It comes from hunters, hikers and anglers, loggers and conservationists, snowmobilers and trail riders.

The Forest Jobs Bill will create timber jobs through new, large forest stewardship projects. The bill requires the Forest Service to manage a certain number of acres each year for timber harvest — especially areas infected by pine-beetles that pose a serious wildfire threat to Montana communities and their drinking water sources.

The bill also requires the Forest Service to put folks to work on restoration projects that help repair our valuable watersheds and improve big game habitat.

The Forest Jobs Bill will also guarantee access for motorized recreation, hunting, camping and fishing. And it will guarantee that Montana's pure water will stay clean forever.

The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is a smart, home-grown solution. It is a result of Montanans working together to create jobs and to keep our backcountry and clean water an important part of our outdoor heritage.

As always, let me know what you think of the Forest Jobs Bill. Introducing the bill is the first step in its journey through Congress.

We are at the beginning of that process, not the end. I encourage all Montanans to read the details of the Forest Jobs Bill for themselves.

You can find updated information, including the entire text of the bill and maps, on my Web site, tester.senate.gov/forest. You can even become a citizen cosponsor. And I encourage you to do so, because it will show the rest of the country that this legislation has the support it deserves moving forward.