



A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA REQUESTING AN INTERIM STUDY OF CERTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS IN MONTANA TO CONVENE STAKEHOLDERS, DISCUSS OPTIONS FOR FUTURE MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING, AND PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS.

WHEREAS, the 95th Congress passed the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977; and

WHEREAS, the Montana Wilderness Study Act required the Secretary of Agriculture to review certain lands within 5 years to determine suitability for preservation as wilderness and report the findings to the President; and

WHEREAS, almost 663,000 acres of land in Montana are designated under the Montana Wilderness Study Act, including the:

- (1) West Pioneer Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 151,000 acres;
- (2) Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 61,000 acres;
- (3) Sapphire Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 94,000 acres;
- (4) Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 34,000 acres;
- (5) Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 81,000 acres;
- (6) Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 91,000 acres; and
- (7) Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area comprising approximately 151,000 acres; and

WHEREAS, the 5-year period for review mandated by the Montana Wilderness Study Act expired in 1982; and

WHEREAS, no legislation has yet been passed by Congress and signed by a president regarding these wilderness study areas despite past attempts to address the issue; and

WHEREAS, the long-term sustainability of public lands depends on good stewardship and professional scientific site-specific management of forest resources, including timber harvest, grazing management, stewardship contracts, and conservation designations and management; and

WHEREAS, 40 years of legal uncertainty have resulted in untenable conflicts between various user

groups, a lack of forest management, decreasing livestock use, reduced motorized opportunities, and decreased funding for noxious weed management; and

WHEREAS, Montana's historic heritage, customs, and culture are linked to the proper stewardship and use of the state's natural resources; and

WHEREAS, these lands are de facto wilderness in lieu of congressional action, a situation that has resulted in a waste of forest assets, no management of public forests, and a harmful reduction in forest road construction and multiple-use access improvements; and

WHEREAS, the failure by Congress to release the lands locked up by the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 severely harms agriculture, timber harvesting, and multiple-use interests, as well as Montana communities and Montana families economically supported by those activities; and

WHEREAS, it is the consensus of the Montana Legislature that more than sufficient time has passed for the study of these lands as to their suitability for preservation as wilderness to be completed under the Montana Wilderness Study Act; and

WHEREAS, national forest lands released from wilderness study would still be subject to the National Forest Management Act, which requires extensive public involvement as the agency develops and updates plans for the management and use of resources in each forest; and

WHEREAS, Montanans have a long history of working together to find common ground on contentious issues related to natural resource management and planning; and

WHEREAS, Montanans have expressed a deep desire to develop and enact sensible legislation for Montana's public lands and wilderness study areas that meet a variety of diverse interests and produce mutual benefits.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee or statutory committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, or direct sufficient staff resources to convene stakeholders with an interest in wilderness study areas to study the history and policy issues related to wilderness study areas.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the committee provide public forums for stakeholders to formulate options for Congress to address the disposition of these lands.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the committee learn about different stakeholder working groups and agency planning processes addressing this issue to better inform their decisions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2020.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions, comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 67th Legislature.

- END -

I hereby certify that the within joint resolution,
SJ 0020, originated in the Senate.

President of the Senate

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2019.

Secretary of the Senate

Speaker of the House

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2019.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20

INTRODUCED BY J. WELBORN

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