

Statement of Cong. Greg Gianforte  
Montana Environmental Quality Council  
July 30, 2020

Members of the Montana Environmental Quality Council;

I appreciate this opportunity to submit a written statement and apologize that my duties in Washington prevent my attendance.

Three principles guide me when it comes to our public lands.

1. We must ensure our public lands stay in public hands.
2. We must protect and increase public access to our public lands.
3. We must listen to and trust our local communities.

Wilderness Study Areas have been studied for decades by federal land management agencies to determine their suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. These recommendations required actions by Congress to implement. After listening to leaders of land management agencies, members of local communities, and state legislators, it was clear that Congress should follow through with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management recommendations.

As you know, it often takes several years to enact a legislative solution. The 2018 legislation was a starting point, and began the legislative process, of which an important part is soliciting feedback and improving the legislation. After the bill was introduced, I continued talking with constituents in every corner of our state, holding public meetings about the issue.

What I learned from that series of meetings is that, while Montanans in impacted communities are eager to implement recommendations from federal land management agencies, others continue to have concerns about adopting the recommendations writ large. We should recognize that each community is unique, and the residents and their leaders know what is best for them. It is important policymakers listen to them.

I look forward to your recommendations.