

**Message for Environmental Quality Council  
July 2020**

**[Erik Nylund intro]**

Hi everyone,

Thank you for allowing me to join the call on behalf of Senator Tester. I'll give a short introduction and then read Senator Tester's message to you all.

Since his election to the U.S. Senate, Senator Tester has believed strongly that the best way to manage Montana's public lands is through collaboration that lets folks on the ground lead the way on what's best for their communities.

His federal lands legislation throughout the years have been based on this bedrock principle.

Senator Tester introduced the *Forest Jobs and Recreation Act* in 2009 which built upon the work of three collaboratives in Montana, and included both release and designation of some WSAs on BLM and Forest Service land. The heart of the proposal was a three legged approach of jobs, recreation, and conservation built by Montanans on the ground who were able to find common cause to move past previous disagreements.

Senator Tester also introduced *Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act*, which was largely a component of FJRA, but made stronger by the coalition of community members who believe deeply in its benefits to conservationists, motorized and mechanized recreation, and timber production. One unique feature of BCSA is the timber partner in the collaborative remains committed to the other interest, even after much of the timber sought in the FJRA was harvested.

And a very recent example of a collaborative success is the *Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act*, which Senator Tester introduced upon request from a local coalition that included business owners, residents, and conservationists.

Each of these examples is a different solution to land management issues in a different community across Montana. But the thru-line here, and what inspires Senator Tester's work on land management across the board is letting local, collaborative efforts from folks on the ground lead the way.

These are complex issues, and there are no easy substitutes for gathering input and finding a compromise that works for Montanans about how to manage our public lands.

And now I'll get to a message from the Senator.

**[U.S. Senator Jon Tester message]**

Hello Chairman Keane and Members of the Environmental Quality Council

Thank you for letting me share a few words today about our public lands and how they're managed.

Make no mistake, our public lands are our heritage, and they power our \$7.1 billion outdoor economy, which includes recreation, tourism, mining, logging, fishing, hunting and more.

Tinkering with the balance shouldn't be taken lightly.

While some folks feel the 1977 Montana Wilderness Study Act resulted in lands sitting in limbo, some folks are satisfied with the level of protection these lands have, and others would like more protection than there is now.

The fact is, if these were simple issues, they would have been resolved before any of us were in office.

I don't pretend to have all the answers to how lands should be managed, but I do believe it's critical that legislators, myself included, take our lead from Montanans in these communities who are willing to roll up their sleeves to find solutions.

This principle has motivated me since my days in the legislature, and animated my work on everything from the introduction of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, which would expand outdoor recreation opportunities and enhance timber production in and around the Blackfoot and Clearwater Valleys, to the successful passage of my Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act, which permanently protects Paradise Valley from foreign gold mining.

Just last week I introduced legislation to permanently protect the Badger-Two Medicine area east of Glacier National Park after extensive consultation with the Blackfoot Tribe, the Forest Service, conservation advocates, and others.

So, when thinking about public lands management across our state, we would all do well to remember WSAs are not the only public lands of importance to Montanans, and they're far from the only areas where the Forest Service recommends action. These aren't isolated islands of land and we can't treat them that way—they are interconnected lands and ecosystems that can't be managed in a vacuum.

And it's important to mention that not all Montanans agree with the Forest Service recommendations.

Sometimes the Forest Service changes their position over time. We cannot and should not ignore that there have been a lot of change since recommendations were made resulting from the 1977 Act.

But the collaboratives who have brought legislation to me over the years have recognized this, and they proposed changes to reflect current ideas, such as permanent recreation or special management areas that preserve the values these areas hold. They worked hard to find

compromises in adjacent lands to satisfy other interests and build coalitions across ideological boundaries and different points of view.

It's not just that through collaborative effort everyone's voice is heard, although that is important. It's that a coalition of voices working together in concert are stronger and build more durable solutions for communities than if folks were just looking out for themselves.

And that's just the type of local collaboration lawmakers should be taking their lead from.

Politicians in Helena forcing a top down decision on Montana communities is not all that different than politicians in Washington, DC telling folks in local areas how to manage their lands without local input. And let me tell you, that's the wrong way for us to manage our public lands.

We need to let Montanans who live, work, and recreate on and around these lands drive the bus here and not let politics force a one-size-fits-all, top down approach onto folks who know what works best for their communities.

Thank you for letting me say a few words today, and please don't ever hesitate to reach out if I can be helpful.