

COUNTY OF RAVALLI



February 11, 2022

House Natural Resource Committee
Chairman Grijalva
Ranking Member Westerman

Subject: Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act-(H.R. 1755)

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman,

This letter has been written to express Ravalli County, Montana's concerns and opposition to the proposed 23 million acres of National Forest System, National Park System and other federal lands being designated as Wilderness across the Northern Rockies region in the states of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon and Washington.

Ravalli County, located in the heart of the Bitterroot National Forest in Western Montana, has long been reliant on our forests' resources for our livelihood and economic sustainability. Almost three quarters (73%) of our county is comprised of National Forest System (NFS) land and almost one third of Ravalli County residents' work is tied to natural resources and/or recreational tourism. Approximately 50% of the Bitterroot National Forest is already designated as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, or some other special protective status.

It is well known that our nation, specifically Montana and the Northern Rockies, is facing extreme wildfire activity. Catastrophic wildfire poses a direct threat to Ravalli County residents who reside in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and adjacent private properties. Designating NFS land as Wilderness severely limits the ability of county residents and land management agencies to respond to, and suppress, wildfires. Wilderness designations prohibit the construction of new roads, fire breaks, mechanized vehicle use and timber harvest which are all vital in the prevention and suppression of wildfire. The use of aerial suppression tactics is also restricted, forcing land management agencies to rely on "on foot" only fire suppression. These tactics are dangerous, time consuming and extremely high in labor demand when initial attack is vital in controlling and suppressing wildfire activity. Citizens from our communities have had to leave their homes not only due the threat of wildfire but also due to the unhealthy and hazardous smoke emitted.

Montana is facing unprecedented population growth and many of these new residents are constructing homes in the WUI. Combined with increasing fire intensity and frequency, it is vital that land management agencies are able to utilize every resource available to prevent wildfires from destroying homes and displacing Ravalli County residents from their workplaces and livelihoods. It is with this that Ravalli County is expressing its opposition to the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (H.R. 1755).

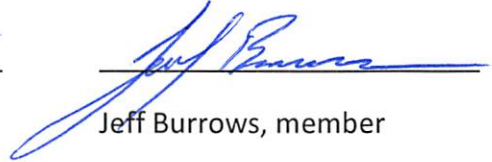
Respectfully,



Dan Huls, Chairman



Greg Chilcott, member



Jeff Burrows, member

cc: file