

Glenda Wiles

From: Dan and Karen Thompson <dkthomps@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2017 9:50 AM
To: Greg Chilcott; Jeff Burrows; Glenda Wiles; Ray Hawk; Chris A. Hoffman; Doug Schallenberger
Cc: Stan Spencer; Merwin Spenser (Daines)
Subject: Ravalli County Wilderness Study Areas

Dear County Commissioners,

Senator Daines is contemplating the possibility of introducing legislation in Congress to deal with "the WSA issue" in Montana. As you may be aware, how the Montana Wilderness Study Areas are managed has been a controversial issue for more than five decades and has spawned dozens of lawsuits. Senator Daines is soliciting support from affected parties for his plan. In particular, Senator Daines is seeking support from Montana's County Commissioners whose areas of responsibility include one or more WSAs.

The Ravalli County Off Road User Association (400 members) and the Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club (325 members) urge the County Commissioners to send a letter to Senator Daines supporting the release of some or all of the Montana WSAs. We believe that Senator Daines' proposal is consistent with the County's Land Use Policy.

Such a letter of support should be sent to Merwin Spenser, Daines' staffer in Missoula. Mr. Spenser's contact information is:

Merwin Spenser
email: spensermerwin@daines.senate
phone: (406) 549-8198

Following is some information concerning those WSAs that are contained in Ravalli County:

In 1977, Congress passed the Montana Wilderness Study Act (MWSA). This Act designated nine areas of public land in Montana as Wilderness Study Areas. Included in these WSAs were two areas that lie all or partially within Ravalli County. Included in these areas were 101,500 acres of public land historically available for snowmobiling and more than 100 miles of trails available to OHVs and mountain bikes.

Sapphire WSA

The Sapphire WSA consists of about 97,000 acres and straddles the boundary between the Bitterroot and B-D National Forests along the Sapphire crest. The Bitterroot NF includes about 37,500 acres of the WSA.

In their 1985 congressionally mandated report, the Bitterroot and B-D Forests concluded that none of the Sapphire WSA was suitable for wilderness designation.

The Bitterroot National Forest Travel Plan closes the portion of the Sapphire WSA (37,500 acres) to all motorized entry and mountain bikes. The B-D portion of the WSA remains available to motorized/mechanized entry. Closure of the Ravalli County portion of the Sapphire WSA precludes access by Bitterroot residents to the open portion of the WSA in the B-D Forest.

Blue Joint WSA

The Blue Joint WSA includes 64,000 acres entirely within the Bitterroot National Forest in the upper West Fork drainage.

In their 1985 congressionally mandated report, the Bitterroot Forest concluded that 27,500 acres of the Blue Joint WSA was suitable for wilderness designation and the remaining 36,500 acres were unsuitable for designation. The 27,500 suitable acres were overprinted with RWA status in the 1987 Bitterroot Forest Plan.

The BNF Travel Plan closes the entire Blue Joint WSA to all motorized and mechanized entry.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dan Thompson
531-3103