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United States Senate

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
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Ravalli County Commissioners

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Ravalli County Board of Commissioners
Ravalli County Board of Commissioners
215 S 4th St Ste A
Hamilton, Montana 59840

Dear Ravalli County Board of Commissioners,

Thank you for contacting me regarding Wilderness Study Areas and the Forest Service's management of Recommended Wilderness Areas. I value your point of view and appreciate the opportunity to respond.

As a fifth generation Montanan and avid sportsman, I know our rich and diverse outdoor landscape is an integral part of our way of life. Our lands give birth to valuable agriculture, robust resource development, and treasured wildlife habitats. Hunting, fishing, hiking, and other forms of outdoor recreation are quintessential to Montanans and are a source of tourism that generates thousands of dollars to our state's economy. As a member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, one of my highest priorities is to uphold the principles at the core of responsible land management--private property rights, multiple-use access, and resource development--for future generations.

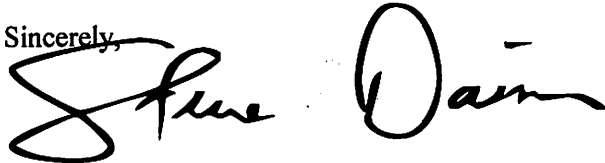
As you know, one tool to manage our land in Montana is to designate certain lands as wilderness. The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System and directed that only Congress can designate federal lands as part of the system. The designation generally prohibits commercial activities, motorized access, and human infrastructure from wilderness areas. Congress can, however, make exceptions for certain uses and development. Montana has close to 3.5 million acres of Wilderness areas, an additional 1.1 million acres of Wilderness Study Areas (WSA's) and close to 1 million acres of U.S. Forest Service Recommended Wilderness.

U.S. Forest Service Wilderness Study Areas were designated by Congress in the 1970's to be researched by the U.S. Forest Service on whether they should or should not be designated as wilderness. In the 1980's the Forest Service made their recommendations to Congress and this resulted in a non-wilderness recommendation or a partial non-wilderness designation for many of the Wilderness Study Areas in Montana. It has since the 1980's been the responsibility of Congress to release the Study Areas or designated them as Wilderness.

I believe any new wilderness designations must enjoy the overwhelming support of local communities, be properly located, protect private property rights, and take into consideration potential impacts on jobs and economic growth in our state. Many of the Wilderness Study Areas in Montana do not enjoy this support and in fact, I have heard from many Montanans closest to these areas that they support the release of the WSA designation. Further the Montana Legislature passed a resolution asking Congress to address the remaining WSA's. Please know that I will keep in mind your thoughts about wilderness as I consider legislation that would add or remove wilderness designations or wilderness study areas in Montana or anywhere else in our country.

Again, thanks for contacting me. It is my number one priority in the Senate to represent the values and interests of the people of Montana, and your input is very helpful as I do. I invite you to visit my website, www.daines.senate.gov, for updates about activities in Washington that affect our lives in Montana or to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Daines". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "S" and a distinct "D".

Steve Daines

United States Senator

SD/jts