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Ravalli County Commissioners

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December 11, 2013

Ravalli County Commissioners  
Hamilton, MT 59870

Dear Commissioner Burrows and Members of the Commission

Re: Public Lands and Reserved Water Rights

As you begin a new year in your position as RC Commissioners, I hope you have taken time to consider the issues you chose to advance in 2013, and evaluate whether the benefits to the general populace of Ravalli County were worth the time, effort and funding expended. As a citizen of Ravalli County, there were two issues concerning Federal Lands that I have followed with interest: one being local control of federal lands, and the other the Federal Reserved Water Rights.

It is troubling to me that you as Commissioners feel you have an obligation to gain management of public lands with the county boundaries. And that you feel you should object to USFS reserved water rights.

It is apparent you are being encouraged in this pursuit by local residents, but they are being encouraged by a constant national movement perpetuated by corporate interests. These same interests are currently endeavoring to pass federal statutes that will privatize our public lands and their management. One only has to look into our history to know that from the very earliest times the wealthiest in our nation have sought to own and exploit any available land and resources. The eastern forests were soon gobbled up and cut down. The same exploitation occurred as development moved west, then the lake states and the southern states, then to the west and the great forests of northwest, California and back to the Rocky Mountains.

Not only our forest lands, but open grazing lands were being grabbed by mining, grazing interests. We are fortunate that as history evolved, there



were wise and thoughtful people in decision making positions, and their supporters, who realized what was left should belong to all the citizens of this country, not just to the wealthy. Thanks to very wise, far sighted and thoughtful leaders, particularly President Theodore Roosevelt and Forester Gifford Pinchot, we now have national forests, national parks, and other federally administered lands set aside as designated public lands.

In my lifetime there have been many movements to take over control of our national forests and other federal lands. Notably the Sagebrush Rebellion on through to the present efforts by the American Lands Council and others. Do we not remember why our ancestors came to America. Many came to exploit, but my ancestors and others came because they could have land that they owned, open land for their children and descendants, they could have access to hunting and fishing, and they would not have to beg for entry to large tracts of land owned by the wealthy.

So in evaluating and balancing your time, efforts and funds for the coming year, I hope you will allocate your resources to protect the health, welfare and safety of the majority of citizens in Ravalli County. It is certainly a stretch for me to believe that you have justification to even contemplate the management of our public lands. And I also think it most unprofessional and unethical to accept private money to advance the cause of a few citizens.

I believe it would help in this evaluation to check on the history of how and why our public lands came to be. It is your obligation to seek objective sources, not sources funded by the corporate interests of the groups perpetuating privatizing public lands. Certainly that research would help in assessing the future impacts to our valley.

On the issue of reserved FS Water Rights. Before you again put county funds, your time and efforts into appealing the provisions of the Compact, you each have an obligation to assess the benefits to all who live here. The visionaries who created the National Forest system did so not only to protect timbered lands for the public interest - they also understood the

need to protect water resources. Our forest and wilderness lands are the most reliable, purest and best source of water resources in this country. The watershed of Ravalli County is one of the best in the nation. Keeping our watershed and reserved water rights in public ownership is the safest way to protect the water for all the people.

So in summary, I would expect you as leaders of this county, to concentrate on the work you have before you in managing the **county** government.

Darlene L. Grove

777-2423

Note to Greg:

John has information and background experience concerning the cost and funds generated by the timber sale program on the national forests in Region one. He would be glad to discuss this with you at any time.