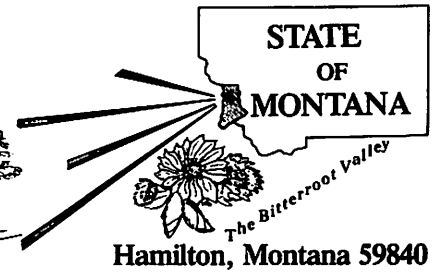
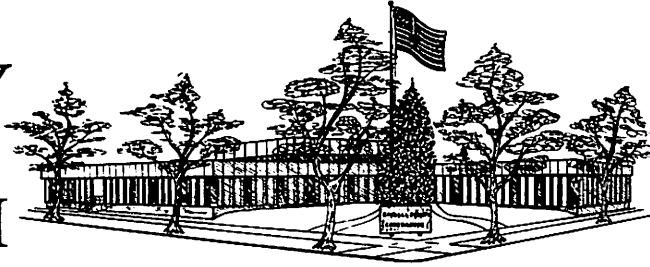


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



September 18, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Tom Shultz
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Subject: Comments on the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Shultz,

On behalf of the citizens of Ravalli County, we write to provide our perspective on the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's review of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (the "Roadless Rule"). As local stakeholders who live and work alongside these public lands, we believe our community's experience offers valuable insights for your consideration.

Since its implementation over two decades ago, the Roadless Rule has significantly affected forest management practices in our region. The rule's restrictions on road construction and reconstruction have negatively impacted public safety for our citizens, firefighters and visitors as well as limiting various management activities, including thinning, prescribed burns and sanitation harvesting. Ravalli County has observed the following impacts:

The Bitterroot National Forest has the highest fire hazard watersheds in the nation due to hazardous fuels loads, insect infestation and disease.

Ravalli County has 1,126,604 acres of USDA Bitterroot National Forest Service land in our jurisdiction, which include:

- 403,438 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area

- 483,882 acres of Wilderness Area
- 103,370 acres of Wilderness Study Area)
- 105,876 acres IRA (road construction allowed)
- 219,485 acres IRA (No road construction allowed)
- 77,077 acres IRA (within Recommended Wilderness Area/WSA)

The Bitterroot National Forest is hamstrung when you consider that **81%** of the forestland in our jurisdiction has a special use designation. These designations significantly limit opportunities for fire suppression, forest management and recreational pursuits.


Ungulate populations live and thrive in healthy forest stands with adequate forage and utilize roads as game trails. Dense, over-grown stands support higher predator populations, which in turn, drive ungulate populations onto working agricultural lands.

Ravalli County has experienced nearly one million acres of catastrophic wildfires since 2000, much of which has been in special designation areas (Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness, WSA, IRA).

Based on the above reasons, we **support** proposed changes to the Roadless Rule.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this important policy and request that you consider the unique conditions and needs of our community in your deliberations. Ravalli County looks forward to working constructively with federal land managers to achieve outcomes that serve both local and national interests.

Respectfully,



Dan Huls, Chairman

ABSENT

Jeff Burrows, Member



Greg Chilcott, Member

cc: Senator Steve Daines
 Senator Tim Sheehy
 Congressman Ryan Zinke
 Congressman Troy Downing
 Governor Greg Gianforte
 Montana Coalition of Forest Counties
 Montana Association of Counties