

* **Permanently protects nearly a million acres of spectacular backcountry** throughout western Montana, including nearly 700,000 acres as wilderness. This includes some 25 spectacular places conservationists have fought hard to preserve for decades.

* Meanwhile, the bill **steers logging to areas that are already roaded** and requires habitat restoration through reduction in road densities, while also reducing fire risk near communities.

* Allocates funds to **improve fisheries, water quality, and wildlife habitat.**

* Areas released from interim wilderness management will be largely **managed to retain their wild character** and may still be considered for protection in the future.



* Legislation is **consistent with all environmental laws**, policies, and regulations including NEPA, endangered species act, habitat protections for grizzly bears, and the national roadless policies and directives.

More Details:

What areas are protected as wilderness? Tester's Jobs and Recreation Act will protect 670,000 acres as new wilderness on three national forests and adjacent BLM lands. These include the headwaters of Rock Creek, the Italian Peaks, the Snowcrest Range and Pioneers, reaches of the Monture Creek watershed, the rugged Grizzly Basin adjacent to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, and Roderick Mountain up the Yaak. These are magnificent places conservationists have fought hard to protect for decades.

What happens to the current wilderness study areas (WSAs)? Tester's forest bill converts 12 wilderness study areas into 8 new wilderness areas and a large national recreation area. Undesignated WSA lands would continue to be managed according to the existing land use plans in place, which in most cases would preserve their wild character. Further, the vast majority of the portion of the Sapphires WSA located on the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest is proposed to become wilderness and the entire West Pioneers WSA would be protected through two new wilderness areas embedded in a very large recreation area.

Why are some WSA's being released? It's been standard practice for decades that wilderness legislation designates some areas as wilderness and release other areas from interim wilderness management, while allowing for them to be re-considered in the future. This bill releases a total of 146,000 acres in 12 WSAs.

Why not just keep everything de-facto wilderness? Congress designated seven Wilderness Study Areas in Montana's national forests more than 30 years ago. This status is a temporary reprieve from road building, mining, logging, and oil and gas extraction, but not from motorized use. Unfortunately, motorized use becomes more entrenched every year. Designating these WSAs now as wilderness areas will bring lasting protection by permanently barring any development and machines. Without any action, these areas will continue to be degraded by expanding motorized vehicle use.

Where will logging occur? The legislation steers logging towards areas that are currently degraded, roaded, and identified as suitable for harvest by the Forest Service, and where insect infestations increase fire hazards near towns. Inventoried roadless lands in the backcountry are still afforded protection by a roadless directive recently issued by the current administration.

What about our fundamental environmental laws? Nothing in this bill changes national environmental laws. Logging and all stewardship activities must be in compliance with all laws, regulations, and policies including NEPA, the endangered species act, or multi-agency grizzly bear habitat standards.

Where would restoration money come from? Stewardship contracts would create jobs aimed at repairing Montana's damaged streams and wildlife habitat while federal funding would augment the sweep of this restoration work. For example, utilizing federal funds on the Blackfoot-Clearwater portion of this bill is expected to create roughly 50 new restoration jobs.

Who supports the Tester bill? Mainstream conservation groups including the Wilderness Society, Montana Wilderness Association, Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Montana Wildlife Federation, Yaak Valley Forest Council, Campaign for America's Wilderness, former Congressman Pat Williams, Montana rod-and-gun clubs and many others.

Is this the end of the wilderness debate in Montana? No. Conservationists continue to work hard to protect special places like the Rocky Mountain Front, Whitefish Divide, Great Burn and Scotchman Peaks. Success today will build more success tomorrow.

Montana Forest Jobs and Recreation Act Forests impacted by legislation

