

Senator Steve Daines: The Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act (S. 2206)

“Forty years of D.C. paralysis has frozen access and use of our public lands and it’s time to put these lands back in the hands of Montanans.” – U.S. Senator Steve Daines

Senator Steve Daines has introduced legislation, the Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act (S. 2206), to protect public access and use of Montana’s public lands by implementing the Forest Service’s recommendation to release 449,500 acres of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in Montana.

Statements of Support

Granite County Commission: *“After hearing much public comment regarding the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area issues and associated issues from the residents of Granite County over the past few months, we strongly support Senator Daines’ sponsored U.S. Senate Bill 2206.”*

Beaverhead County Commissioners: *“The Beaverhead County Commissioners believe that the over 10 million acres of wilderness and national parks within one day’s drive of Dillon are ample in meeting ecological, environmental, and human needs for wilderness in this region. We therefore urge the agencies to forego an agenda of adding acres to wilderness for the sake of adding acres to wilderness. As well as to manage remaining non-wilderness federal lands to allow the greatest degree of access to the widest spectrum of users, to provide the highest level of utilitarian-compatible multiple-uses, and to employ our knowledge of revenue generating methods for the benefit of Beaverhead County Citizens, the visitors who come to see this northern Rocky Mountain landscape, and all of the people of the United States.”*

Ravalli County Commissioners: *“Ravalli County strongly supports legislation to finally address WSAs. Ravalli County has been asking Congress and the Department of Agriculture to address this critical land use issue for years...These Wilderness Areas are, in many cases, the origin of catastrophic forest fires that burn tens of thousands of acres of National Forest, State Forest and private property every year. The Ravalli County Commissioners strongly support and encourage federal policy reform that requires active forest management rather than the current model that results in catastrophic fires, loss of life and property, economic impacts, loss of wildlife habitat and significant impacts to our citizen’s health and safety from hazardous air quality.”*

Judith Basin County Commissioners: *“The Judith Basin County Commissioners would ask Congress to remove the Wilderness Study Area classification from the Middle Fork of the Judith Basin River in the Little Belt Mountain and have the Forest Service manage the area as non-wilderness.”*

Fergus County Commissioners: *“The Fergus County Commissioners are in support of the efforts to remove 98,000 acres from the Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area designation. We believe this area has languished under this designation long enough. It is time to allow the Forest Service to integrate the management of these lands with the rest of the national forest lands...we appreciate the consideration afforded local government when making decisions that impact our community and our way of life.”*

Russell Country Sportsmen's Association: *"Russell Country Sportsmen's Association supports the legislation introduced by Senator Daines that would remove Wilderness Study Area designations in the Middle Fork of the Judith and the Big Snowies of the Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest. The Forest Service study of these areas was completed over 40 years ago with the recommendation by the Forest Service that non-wilderness management be approved for both areas. The current WSA status of these areas is a roadblock to good forest management and public recreation. Removing these designations will restore public access to our public lands and multiple-use to our forest."*

Montana Association of Counties Public Lands Committee Chairman, Greg Chilcott (Ravalli County Commissioner): *"We urge Congress to take action on this long-overdue issue and release those lands determined through agency analysis as not suitable for wilderness designation. The studies have been done, the reports have been filed, and recommendations have gone unnoticed for years while a failure to act has crippled the Forest Service's ability to manage these public lands."*

Austin Knudsen, Speaker of the Montana House of Representatives: *"I'm glad that Senator Steve Daines heard the Legislature's call for action and has introduced legislation to review hundreds of thousands of acres of Wilderness Study Area designations in Montana. The Legislature recognizes the different uses of our public lands and the multiple benefits to the diverse communities they serve, and it's high time to ensure that lands currently designated as WSA unnecessarily are removed."*

Mac Minard, Executive Director, Montana Outfitters and Guides Association: *"MOGA strongly supports access for all user groups and sound management of our public lands. Ensuring these areas are removed from a management directive that is not compatible with what the Forest Service studies concluded nearly 40 years ago will allow a new process to determine future management of these areas."*

Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association: *"Our organizations strongly support the Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act because all recreationists – including motorized, the disabled, the elderly, and more – should have the opportunity to engage in recreational activity on public land in areas that are deemed suitable for uses of their choice, through public processes, without the complication that Wilderness Study Areas present to land managers and the public at large. This act provides an opportunity for more public dialog about the use of these public lands and will allow everyone in the public to participate in the planning processes to determine which uses are suitable for a particular landscape."*

Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists: *"The BBC supports Senator Daines bill (S. 2206) to release those WSAs, such as Sapphire and Blue Joint, that did not receive wilderness recommendation and have local support for this action."*

Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife: *"Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife's primary mission is to preserve hunting, trapping, and fishing rights while protecting Montana's rural heritage. Therefore S. 2206 is the perfect public policy change that is central to our purpose and fortifies access for sportsmen. This legislation brings much needed closure to an issue that should have been decided decades ago, and most importantly allows people with limited capabilities and assets to access our public lands."*

Hans McPherson, President, Montana Farm Bureau Federation: *"Our members appreciate that there is a renewed focus on the management of federal lands, especially with regard to Wilderness Study Areas. MFBF supports the release of all Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) that have been designated as WSAs for more than five years but have failed to reach wilderness status."*

Russ Ehnes, Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association: *"The Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association strongly supports Senator Daines effort to release Montana Wilderness Study Areas for forest management. The forty-one years of "limbo" needs to end for these areas so our professional land managers can make decisions that are best for the land, forests, and citizens of Montana. The current status of these lands only complicates forest planning and has resulted in areas with poor forest health and few options for management."*

Senator Fred Thomas, Montana Senate Majority Leader: *"As the Senate Majority Leader of Montana, I have seen first-hand the significant challenges that both the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas have presented when it comes to land management. I, along with the rest of the community, strongly support Senator Daines efforts to release portions of the WSA's in Ravalli County. Bringing certainty to lands that have been in limbo since their analysis nearly forty years ago only creates more difficulty for local communities and land managers alike."*

Jason Howell, President, Montana Snowmobile Association: *"The Montana Snowmobile Association promotes responsible use of public lands for winter recreation. These landscapes are important winter recreation areas that have been previously identified as not meeting a recommendation for Wilderness and we therefore support the release of the antiquated WSA status."*

Citizens for Balanced Use: *"CBU supports the release of the North Fork of the Judith River in the Little Belt Mountains and the Big Snowy Mountains from Wilderness Study Area designation. These areas were placed under wilderness study in 1977 and were only to remain for a brief period of time and until a formal recommendation were to occur. Wilderness evaluations by the Forest Service have shown these areas as NOT suitable for wilderness designation yet Congress has not formally released them. CBU believes it is time for these areas to be released."*