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Editor:

It has been nearly a quarter century since members of the Lewis and Clark County Commission were invited to testify at congressional hearings on Montana wilderness legislation. Successive commissions have urged congressional cooperation to conserve the outdoor legacy of Lewis and Clark County. Yet little progress has been made. The commission recommendations as well as those of the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service remain unresolved.

This is why we are encouraging the members of Montana's congressional delegation to sponsor legislation to enact the Blackfoot Landscape Stewardship Pilot Project proposed for the Lolo National Forest by a coalition of Montana conservation, timber and outdoor groups.

The Blackfoot Stewardship Pilot Project proposes legislation to designate wilderness tracts, expand successful stewardship, fuel treatment and watershed restoration programs and assist in developing a plant to utilize small fuels. We strongly endorse this project and believe that the majestic lakes and trails in the Blackfoot Valley that are located within Lewis and Clark County be included in the proposal for addition to the Scapegoat Wilderness.

At the same time the commission also supports fuel treatments in urban interface areas, watershed restoration and stewardship projects with multiple public benefits. Here too gridlock prevails and funding fails short.

In the past, timber industry and conservation groups fought bitterly over wilderness and national forest management. Today these Montanans have set aside differences to build new landscape partnerships for the future. We feel it is essential that Montana's congressional delegation work together to reward this cooperation by enacting the proposed legislative pilot package.

We feel this is an excellent pilot program that encompasses a carefully-balanced landscape partnership and encourage congressional support and subsequently expansion of this model to be included in other national forests and public lands in southwest Montana.

Mike Murray, Chair
Lewis and Clark County Commission

Ed Tinsley
County Commissioner

Andy Hunthausen