

January 27, 2009

Senator Max Baucus
Senator Jon Tester
Representative Denny Rehberg

Dear Sirs,

The Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association wishes to express our support for the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project proposed by a coalition of Montana conservation, timber, small business, and outdoor groups. We encourage you to pass legislation enacting this well-balanced pilot plan to actively manage forests in the Seeley Lake Ranger District, designate 87,000 acres of wilderness in the Bob Marshall country, and build a co-generation plant at Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake.

The Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association was started in the early 1960's to focus on wilderness related issues in Montana. All members are required to have a minimum amount of pack and riding stock, camp equipment commensurate with the stock, specific experience requirements, operate in a designated Wilderness area, and meet other standards. We work closely with the Forest Service and the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department to preserve the wilderness, its fish, and wildlife. We want to share this unique part of our state and heritage with those who would appreciate it. Our goal is to provide an unforgettable experience to wilderness visitors that will be one of the highlights of their lives.

The Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association has reviewed and discussed the various components of the proposal. The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project would expand stewardship funding to actively manage the forest, restore watersheds and ecosystems, and improve fish and wildlife habitat. It would also assist in developing a co-generation plant to utilize woody fuels from the thinned forests. A final and key component is the designation of additional wilderness lands.

The goals of this project are very much in line with our mission. By permanently protecting lands that have been recommended wilderness for the past 25 years, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project will ensure that we can continue to provide our guests with unforgettable experiences in backcountry, roadless, wilderness areas. Further, we believe this project will give the Seeley Lake Ranger District and the community of Seeley Lake the resources it needs to manage its forests appropriately. Finally, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project would stimulate the economy in a critical time of need by creating 50 jobs while simultaneously providing a market for biomass that is currently burned in the field.

Thank you for your consideration of this important pilot project and the potential legislation that would implement it. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (406) 793-5890.

Sincerely,

Greg Gilchrist, President of the Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association