

Senator Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jon Tester
724 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510-2604

Congressman Denny Rehberg
2448 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

August 5th, 2010

Dear Senators Baucus and Tester and Congressman Rehberg:

The Rocky Mountain Front (RMF) has served as a working laboratory for wildlife managers for over 100 years, and we believe that permanently protecting this magnificent area is worthy of your efforts. Grizzly bear, elk, mule deer, Curlew, Golden and Bald Eagles, native grasses and forbs all flourish in this intact ecosystem. In fact, the Front remains in the top 1% of all wildlife habitats in the lower 48 states and embodies a conservation heritage that dates back over 100 years. Indeed, the North American Model of Fish and Wildlife Conservation can trace its roots to the efforts which led to the establishment of the Sun River Game Preserve in 1913. That conservation heritage was reaffirmed when Senator Burns and Senator Baucus championed the oil and gas lease withdrawal of 2007.

Currently, the RMF contains the second largest migratory elk herd in the lower 48; abundant bighorn sheep and mountain goat populations, a robust and growing raptor population, and the full complement of predators from the time of Lewis and Clark. These migratory animals need big, wild country in order to function properly in their niche within the ecosystem. The Front contains that big, wild country. Public land managers and private land owners have been wonderful stewards over the last century, and that has both increased the game species that we hunt and fish for and maintained a diverse community of animal and plant life found nowhere else along the Rocky Mountains.

Over 100,000 acres of private land has been permanently protected through conservation easements, and land owners are queuing up to offer another 100,000 acres for protections. These private landowners have led the way to protecting large, intact ecosystems and it is only common sense to follow suit on the federal public lands with an insurance policy for future generations that maintains the Front as it is today. This country provides not only valuable habitat for wildlife, but helps sustain the rural economies through hunting and fishing. According to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, hunters and anglers spend over \$10 million annually along the Front. Protecting and maintaining habitat functionality means protecting and maintaining rural economies too.

We must continue to invest in conservation in order for this intact ecosystem to remain functioning at current levels. This means protecting migration routes, rivers and streams while preventing the spread of noxious weeds. Through grassroots efforts, the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front has put together a comprehensive and well thought out approach in its Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act. The proposal would ensure that wildlife habitat, water

quality, and public access are protected. The three components of the proposal (additions to the Bob Marshall Wilderness, conservation management area designation, and expanded noxious weed control program) work together to protect core grizzly bear habitat, maintain elk and mule deer migration corridors and transitional ranges, and ensure that the Rocky Mountain Front's large bighorn sheep herd will always have a place to thrive.

As Montana's climate continues to warm and the seasonality of precipitation changes it is critical to safeguard large landscapes so wildlife can adapt easier to varied climatic conditions. By adding 86,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and designating 218,000 acres as Conservation Management Area (CMA) the Heritage Act increases habitat security for many species. The CMA provides wildlife managers with the continued flexibility to monitor grizzly bears, wolves and other threatened and endangered species, while still counting elk, deer and bighorns. The Heritage Act also includes provisions to help wildlife managers face the challenges of noxious weed management in a changing climate.

As wildlife professionals and land managers, we believe that the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act proposal was put together by folks who have an understanding not only of the Front, but of the intricacies and challenges faced by wildlife managers in a changing world. As former wildlife managers, biologists and game wardens who have spent our lives dedicated to wildlife conservation, we ask that you champion the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act.

Time is not on our side when it comes to preserving these habitats. Acting now helps ensure that our children, and their children, will continue to enjoy the economies created by large, intact ecosystems, as well as the clean, cold water we all rely on for drinking water, and the big, wild country we need to sustain our vast wildlife populations on the Front.

Sincerely,

Stan Meyer, former Chair, FWP Commission
Jeff Hagener, former Director FWP
Pat Graham, former Director FWP
Jim Flynn, former Director FWP
Rich Clough, former Chief of Operations
Larry Peterman, Deputy Director
Arnie Olson, former Parks Division Administrator
Jim Posewitz, former Environmental Services Chief
Glenn Erikson, former Wildlife Bureau Chief
Mike Aderhold, former Region 4 Supervisor
Gayle Joslin, former FWP Regional Biologist, Region 4
Larry Davis, former Game Warden, Region 4 (Augusta)
Dave Mari, former BLM field manager (Lewistown)
Gene Terland, Former State Director, Bureau of Land Management
Dan Carney, Blackeet Tribal Fish and Wildlife biologist (bear specialist)