



Protecting Montana's wildlife,  
land, waters and hunting & fishing  
heritage for future generations.

July 19, 2017

The Honorable Mike Lee  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and  
Mining  
Committee Energy and Natural Resources  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and  
Mining  
Committee Energy and Natural Resources  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act (S. 941)

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Wyden:

The Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) is Montana's oldest and largest sportsmen's conservation organization. Since 1936, we've led efforts to protect Montana's abundant fish and wildlife, our natural lands and waters, and public access for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation. Our members include thousands of Montanans and people from across the nation who enjoy hunting, angling, wildlife watching and seek to Montana's lands, waters, and outdoor heritage for future generations.

Senator Jon Tester introduced the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act (S. 941) after local residents and businesses asked Montana's congressional delegation to protect the region from large-scale mining operations. The bill would permanently withdraws federal mineral rights on 30,000 acres of public land in the Custer Gallatin National Forest adjacent to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park. The bill eliminates the ability for proposed mines to expand onto unclaimed public land.

As you know, Yellowstone National Park is a place of state, regional, national, and international significance. More than four million people visited Yellowstone National Park last year. People come from around the world every year to the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem to experience the pristine land and water, and marvel at the abundance of fish and wildlife. These visitors spent an average of \$196 million in Park County, Montana, in 2014. The Greater Yellowstone ecosystem sustains thousands of jobs in tourism, outdoor recreation, hunting, fishing, farming and ranching. Senator Tester's bill recognizes that a protected Yellowstone National Park and a clean Yellowstone River are worth more to Montanans than short-term mineral extraction.

The Montana Wildlife Federation recognizes that mining is an appropriate activity on some public lands. The doorstep of Yellowstone National Park and the headwaters of the Yellowstone River is not a place where mining is appropriate. The ecosystem's incredible public lands, agricultural heritage, clean rivers and pristine streams are the lifeblood of the local economy.

Sen. Tester's bill provides a simple and direct withdrawal of mineral rights and should be adopted as introduced. Congress has used virtually identical legislative language to prevent mineral development in other high priority landscapes that have strong local support, including the North Fork Watershed Protection Act of 2014 (Section 3063, Public Law 113-291). In addition, Senator Tester's bill specifically protects hunting, fishing, and other recreational uses within the withdrawal area.

The simple, clear language in S. 941 is the most effective way to accomplish the objective of protecting the Yellowstone landscape. There is no need to develop alternative legislation, and no guarantee that any other legislation will be as effective. We further urge you resist any efforts to bring unrelated issues into the bill, which could disrupt the strong bipartisan consensus behind this proposal.

Passage of the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act will mean cold clear water for trout, anglers, boaters and, irrigation, elk and bighorn sheep for wildlife watchers and hunters, and economic activity for Montana communities. We urge you to approve this bill and work to secure its enactment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Chadwick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Chadwick  
Executive Director