

State's conservationists chided for timidity

October 16, 1982

MISSOULA (AP) — A small but fiery national environmental group says that more moderate conservation groups “don’t have the guts” to fight for a decent-sized Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area.

Earth First is based in Ely, Nev., and claims about 2,000 members, including ones in Montana. It says that groups like The Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Madison-Gallatin Alliance and Montana Wilderness Association have been so busy trying to compromise with Sen. John Melcher, D-Mont., that “they’ve nearly given away the entire ball game.”

Melcher has introduced a bill calling for the creation of a wilderness area and wildlife management area in the Gallatin and Beaverhead National forests south of Bozeman to honor the late Sen Lee Metcalf, D-Mont.

This is a sized-down version of the 1,000,000-acre Metcalf area originally sought by groups like the Madison-Gallatin Alliance.

But Earth First said in a news release Friday that it is calling for a 925,000-acre Lee Metcalf National Preserve and Wilderness south of Bozeman.

The National Park Service, which would administer the area, would take over the affected lands in the Gallatin and Beaverhead national forests.

“This is the only way to insure protection for this vital link in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Forest Service obviously can’t do the job,” said Howie Wolke of Jackson, Wyo. Earth First’s wilderness coordinator for Wyoming and Montana.

Tony Moore, an Earth First spokesman in Missoula, said aspects of the proposal include:

- All land within the Gallatin and Beaverhead national forests “owned” by Burlington Northern Railroad will be immediately returned to the federal government.
- The Montana Snowmobile Association shall obliterate, at its expense, the north-south snowmachine route illegally built through the proposed area,
- Portions of the Madison, Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers will be designated as “wild” and “scenic.”
- U.S. 191 within the preserve will be designated a scenic highway corridor and will remain at two lanes.
- The Ski Yellowstone special use permit will be revoked.
- The Big Sky special use permit will be immediately revoked. All buildings, roads, powerlines, ski lifts and other developments associated with the Big Sky resort “shall be removed and obliterated” by no later than December 1987.
- There would be two large wilderness units within the preserve. Some areas where there has been some development would become “wilderness recovery areas,” which eventually would be designated wilderness.

- The federal government would withdraw the area from mineral entry and acquire existing mineral rights.

Moore said Melcher's wilderness bill is actually anti-wilderness and the senator's "efforts to accommodate Burlington Northern's every whim are an insult" to Metcalf's memory as a great conservationist.

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The Independent-Record (Helena, Montana), October 16, 1982, page 4.
<www.newspapers.com/article/the-independent-record/189098782>

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