



# CLEARWATER DEFENDER

## NEWS OF THE BIG WILD

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FRIENDS OF THE CLEARWATER

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### **Wilderness in the Northern Rockies: The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act HR 980**

**by Brett Haverstick**

On May 5, 2009 the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held a hearing on the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA). After fifteen years of stalling and waiting, the bill has now received two hearings in as many years and may be heading towards a vote on the House floor for the first time ever. If the bill passes the House floor, it would advance to the Senate, where it has never been. This is incredibly exciting news for advocates of NREPA, and all of those that have worked tirelessly over the years to keep things wild in the Northern Rockies. Testifying in Congress this year were Gary Macfarlane and Dean Stewart of Moscow, as well as Idaho's very own Carole King. King has been working around the clock to lobby Congress and gain political support for NREPA. She has been doing an outstanding job. The bill is currently sponsored by Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and has national bi-partisan support.

The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act was conceived by the Alliance for the Wild Rockies in 1992. The Alliance worked with leading conservation biologists, local economists and dedicated citizen groups to craft a solution to protect the native biodiversity in the region. The Northern Rockies still contain all of the species that were present during the Lewis & Clark expedition over 200 years ago. These unspoiled wildlands are the last strongholds of the grizzly, the woodland caribou, and the bull trout, and they provide crucial



*Weitas Creek Roadless Area is a Big Wild favorite*  
FOC File photo

**See Wilderness page 4**



*Radcliff-Gedney Roadless Area needs protection*

Brett Haverstick photo



FRIENDS OF THE CLEARWATER

THE CLEARWATER DEFENDER

IS A PUBLICATION OF:

**Friends of the Clearwater**

P.O. Box 9241, Moscow, Idaho 83843

208-882-9755

foc@friendsoftheclearwater.org

www.friendsoftheclearwater.org

Friends of the Clearwater, a recognized nonprofit organization since 1987, defends the Clearwater Bioregion's wildlands and biodiversity through a Forest Watch program, litigation, grassroots public involvement, outreach, and education. The Wild Clearwater Country, the northern half of central Idaho's Big Wild, contains many unprotected roadless areas and wild rivers and provides crucial habitat for countless, rare, plant and animal species. Friends of the Clearwater strives to protect these areas, restore degraded habitats, preserve viable populations of native species, recognize national and international wildlife corridors, and bring an end to commodity extraction and industrialization on public lands.

Friends of the Clearwater is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions to Friends of the Clearwater are tax-deductible.

The Clearwater Defender welcomes artwork and articles pertaining to the protection of the Big Wild. Articles in the Clearwater Defender do not necessarily reflect the views of Friends of the Clearwater.

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## **Bureaucratic Bungling: The Story of the Upper Lochsa Land Exchange**

**by Gary Macfarlane**

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For years, the Nez Perce Tribe, conservationists, and the Forest Service have sought to obtain the checkerboard Plum Creek sections in the upper Lochsa. These sections are literally square mile parcels of land so the land ownership pattern resembles a checkerboard on a map. Simply put, it is difficult to manage such an area. This is a crucial area in the heart of the Clearwater and forms an important corridor between the Selway-Bitterroot to the south and the wild country of the North Fork Clearwater to the north. Nonetheless, most of these square miles that Plum Creek previously owned (see below) have been heavily logged and are in dire need of road removal and other restoration actions to restore the watershed.

These sections are the legacy of railroad land grants in the 1800's. An interesting but little known story is how the railroads never lived up to their end of the agreement with the US Government, and by all rights the land should have been returned to the public domain. The Lands Council in Spokane published the book *Railroads and Clearcuts* by Derrick Jensen, George Draffan and John Osborn in 1995. Dr. John Osborn is a well-known conservationist in Spokane who has worked tirelessly for years to protect wildlands in northern Idaho, including the wild Clearwater region. The book documents the rampant fraud and land abuse of the 1800's, and the legacy which makes proper public land management by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management difficult today. More information about the book and this history can be seen at the website [www.landgrant.org](http://www.landgrant.org).

A few years ago, Tim Blixseth bought the Plum Creek sections for the express purpose of facilitating a land exchange with the Forest Service. This caused some alarm within the Forest Service because Blixseth was a major player in the Gallatin

land exchanges near Yellowstone National Park. He and his company forged sweetheart deals by threatening to develop and subdivide prime wildlife habitat near the Park. (For more information see [www.landgrant.org/blixseth.htm](http://www.landgrant.org/blixseth.htm)). As a result, the agency proposed a land exchange that would give important forested parcels of public land for the cut-over upper Lochsa. The original proposal was and is a disaster from a few key perspectives.

First, the proposal is an exchange and does not emphasize ways to purchase the upper Lochsa. A purchase would be in the interest of almost all, but it appears this will be a throw-away option that is not seriously considered in the environmental analysis. On the other hand, history has shown that most recent large land exchanges involving public lands were not in the public interest.

Second, the proposal would trade away important undeveloped salmon and steelhead habitat near Elk City in the American River drainage (including the mainstem American River, East Fork of the American River, and Flint Creek) for degraded habitat in the upper Lochsa. In turn, it is likely that this existing good habitat in the South Fork would be degraded by future logging. Roger and Janice Inghram, active conservationists and FOC members from Grangeville, prepared a video showing the important wetland and other habitat that would be given away and submitted it to the Forest Service. It is not in the public interest to trade away prime national forest areas for cut-over land.

Third, while the inholdings in the upper Lochsa would be consolidated, this proposal would create more inholdings inside public land near Elk City by creating an inholding between the national forest and other public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. This is like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Fourth, crucial land on the Palouse Ranger District including the Potlatch river canyon, would be given away. These areas are prime wildlife habitat enjoyed by thousands of people. Again, it is not in the public interest to trade away prime national forest areas for cut-over land.

After receiving significant public opposition to the exchange, the Forest Service tried to mollify the opposition rather than listen to the substance of the concerns. That hasn't worked. Almost every opponent

**See Land Exchange page 5**

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## Wilderness cont. from page 1

habitat for free-roaming herds of elk, moose, cougar, wolves, big horn sheep, bison, and much more. The Northern Rockies have been identified by conservation biologists as the largest intact ecosystem in the contiguous U.S. This is largely attributed to the vast amount of federal lands in the region, which allow natural processes to occur as they have for thousands of years.

NREPA would designate 24 million acres of roadless wildlands as Wilderness and place them into the National Wilderness Preservation System. All of the lands are public and stretch over a five state area. A combined 1.5 million acres would come from the remaining roadless base in eastern Washington and northeastern Oregon, 9.5 million acres would come from Idaho's vast backcountry, 8 million acres would come from Montana wildlands, and just over 5 million acres would be included from Wyoming. The majority of these lands are under the jurisdiction of the US Forest Service, with a small portion coming from Bureau of Land Management lands. The roadless backcountry of Glacier, Yellowstone, and Teton National Parks would also be included in the bill, making the National Park Service an important partner in helping this preservation effort succeed.

HR 980 is a visionary piece of legislation that adheres to ecosystem science and biological principles instead of traditional industry demands and political boundaries. Wilderness legislation in the United States has historically been a piece-meal approach to preserving biodiversity and wildlife habitat through "Island" designation. In contrast, NREPA is a landscape approach to preserving the fertile soils and rich native biodiversity of the entire Northern Rockies. It represents the change we need to see in Wilderness legislation for the 21st Century by putting science at the forefront.

Wilderness designation in the bill would come from 3 areas: the Greater-Ecosystem additions, the Biological Corridors provision, and the Sky Island additions. Conservation biologists have identified five greater ecosystems within the Northern Rockies bioregion that still contain native plant and wildlife populations: Hells Canyon/Wallowa, Salmon/Selway, Cabinet/Yaak/Selkirk, Glacier/Northern Continental Divide, and Yellowstone. These core wildlands contain 16 million acres of undeveloped

roadless country and are the backbone to the bill. The Biological Corridors would connect the greater ecosystems by providing land and waterway bridges for migrating terrestrial and aquatic species in search of food and habitat during climate change. The corridor provision would supply approximately 5 million acres of Wilderness. The Sky Islands are isolated roadless mountain ranges in Washington, Oregon and Wyoming that provide excellent wildlife habitat and qualify for Wilderness designation. They total approximately 3 million acres.

A greater ecosystem can be defined as an ecological land unit large enough to support native wildlife and plant associations, including large populations of vertebrate species. Centuries of reckless industrial extraction, habitat fragmentation, and private development have severely threatened and reduced native populations. When combined with climate change, scientists are deeply concerned the current habitat and food supply for threatened/endangered species in the Northern Rockies may not be adequate.



*Carole King and Dean Stewart rockin' NREPA*

Colleen Corrigan photo

With a predicted rise in temperatures and shifting mosaic of vegetation, a larger, more productive range may be necessary at lower elevations for species to safely migrate and survive. The greater ecosystem

**See Wilderness page 7**

## Wilderness cont. from page 4

and biological corridor provisions are aimed at avoiding further species degradation and ensuring genetic exchange.

The aquatic component of HR 980 is grounded in today's leading science as well. The underlying goal is to preserve Rocky Mountain watersheds by denying unnecessary road development and instead protect waterways through the Wild & Scenic River Act of 1968. Designation would occur throughout the bioregion, with all protected river miles occurring in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Approximately 1,700 miles would be protected, including headwaters for the Clearwater, Salmon, and Snake Rivers. Designation could greatly benefit threatened/endangered fish populations such as bull trout, west-slope cutthroat trout, chinook/sockeye salmon, and steelhead. If some of the dams are ever breached on the Snake and Columbia Rivers, Idaho waterways could once again be filled with abundant spawning fish populations. NREPA would ensure that their habitat is protected in perpetuity. In short, HR 980 would ensure fresh water to down-stream rural and urban communities, secure excellent habitat for dwindling fish populations, provide further white-water recreation opportunities, and prevent some of America's last wild and free waterways from development and degradation.

The last critical component of NREPA is wildland recovery. Grounded in fiscal responsibility and shaped by regional economic trends, the program would be responsible for the planning and restoration of 9 wildland units within the bioregion. Over 1 million acres of damaged wildlands would be restored through road removal, slope stabilization, invasive species eradication, native seed plantings, and the removal of unnecessary fish barriers. Economist Mike Garrity of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies estimates that administration, labor, and equipment would cost taxpayers approximately \$130 million. Industry plans for logging the roadless base of the bioregion would cost the American taxpayer \$375 million. The math is simple: NREPA is economically more prudent.

In summary, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act is on the move and heading to places it has never been. Momentum is on our side and we need to keep this vision rolling. This is an excellent time to contact your local Congressmen and voice your sup-

port for HR 980. All of the lands contained in this bill are public lands, places that are our heritage and waterways that contain our history. No matter where you live, or how frequent you are able to visit these vast unspoiled wildlands, I am urging you to take action and lend a voice for wildness. Now is the time to move forward and resolve the long, drawn out roadless battle of our generation. A strong citizen front is needed to combat power politics and industry greed. The time has come for us to give back to this wonderful landscape. We can reach our dreams if we stick together.

To learn more about NREPA please go to [www.friendsoftheclearwater.org](http://www.friendsoftheclearwater.org) or [www.wildrockiesalliance.org](http://www.wildrockiesalliance.org). These websites will direct you on how to contact your local Congressmen. Thank you and stay wild!

**Idaho Representative  
Walt Minnick's  
Washington, DC Office:  
1517 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-6611  
Fax: (202) 225-3029**

## HR 980

- **Wilderness designation**
- **Wild & Scenic river protection**
- **Connected biological corridors**
- **Damaged wildland restoration**
- **Tax payer savings**
- **Nationwide political support**

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## Once Again, Rehberg Gets It Wrong

by Paul Richards

Montana's far-right Rep. Denny Rehberg got a lot of ink with his tirade against H.R. 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA) and his mean-spirited attack upon Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, who is sponsoring the Act, along with 70 other members of Congress (for his testimony, see [http://www.newwest.net/pdfs/testimony\\_rehberg.pdf](http://www.newwest.net/pdfs/testimony_rehberg.pdf)).

Rehberg claims "96 percent of us who live in these areas oppose this bill." In reality, 78 percent of all Montanans support full protection for our region's remaining National Forest roadless wildlands. Montanans overwhelmingly support the "Roadless Conservation Rule" that safeguarded the 6.4 million acres that are included in NREPA.

The Roadless Conservation Rule received the most public participation of any proposed federal regulation in the history of the nation. In Montana, 34 hearings were held across the state, while over 600 hearings were held throughout the country.

In total, more than 1.6 million Americans wrote comments on the roadless protection policy. An overwhelming majority – 78 percent of all Montanans and 95 percent of all Americans – supported full protection for our country's roadless wildlands.

Rehberg claims that NREPA "federalizes" these public roadless wildlands and that "bills like NREPA create more federally controlled land." Apparently, Rehberg does not know basic American history: His fellow Republican, President Theodore Roosevelt "federalized" these lands in 1907, over 100 years ago!

Rehberg evokes the most passion with his stirring defense of gun rights. "There's a new concern looming in the minds of the folks around Montana and the country," he warns. "There aren't many things folks in the Northern Rockies care more about than their Second Amendment rights. Bills like NREPA create more federally controlled land, but they don't guarantee Second Amendment rights on that land."

Huh? Rehberg, one of the richest members of

Congress, is a land developer and spokesman for big oil. Were he a hunter or outdoorsman, he would know that, since our roadless wildlands provide the best habitat, they are the preferred places for big game hunting. With guns. Has Rehberg ever heard of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, our region's hunting Mecca?

Montana has the best hunting season in the country, and it's not by accident. Our five-week-long hunting season is due directly to the prime habitat provided by these 6.4 million acres of roadless wildlands. Montana hunters and anglers want these lands protected.

Rehberg is just plain WRONG when he claims Montanans do not support these priceless wildlands. Rehberg is WRONG when he says we don't appreciate their pure water, clean air, and abundant fish and wildlife. Rehberg is WRONG when he claims Montanans and other residents of the Northern Rockies want to destroy these public wildlands with taxpayer-subsidized road-building, logging, mining, and other development.

Despite Rehberg's claims: Private land is NOT affected by NREPA; grazing and existing mining claims are NOT changed; gun rights are NOT taken away; and environmentally-sustainable logging outside roadless areas will continue. We're NOT talking about already-developed national forestlands. These are federally-inventoried ROADLESS AREAS, for God's sake! They have been wild for millennia. Their remaining so will not bring about apocalypse.

Rehberg apparently has no concept of leaving future generations a public lands legacy. Our future citizenry will need these wildlands for psychological, spiritual, scientific, economic, educational, biological, ecological, and societal well-being. Public wildlands are simply too valuable to be recklessly squandered away by short-term politicians like Rehberg.

The biggest lie that Rehberg and other extremists perpetuate about NREPA is that it is "top-down" management, forced upon us locals by "outsiders" like Rep. Maloney. First, these National Forest wildlands belong to ALL Americans, not just local anti-wilderness rednecks.

More importantly, Rehberg is just plain wrong about NREPA's origins. After consulting with numerous Montana conservation organizations and wildlife biologists, I wrote the first draft of what-was-to-be-



*Kelly Creek RA, also known as The Great Burn, a sprawling wildland straddling the ID-MT border*

Chuck Pezeshki photo

come the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act in 1986. After involving about a dozen more regional conservation groups, I wrote the text of the second draft of what-was-to-become NREPA in 1987.

I'm not an "outsider." I was born and raised in Helena. Growing up in Montana, we always heard about "multiple use" for our National Forests. When I was a kid in the 1950's and 1960's, that meant hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, hunting, grazing, and fishing.

In the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's, however, we saw more and more National Forest wildlands converted into single uses: Roads, clearcuts, same-species tree plantations, scars from off-road vehicles, open pit mines, and toxic mine waste dumps.

Now, in the National Forest nearest my home, two-thirds of the Forest has been developed. We who grew up here have first-hand knowledge that roadless wildlands are fast disappearing. Roads

on National Forests in Montana increased from 8,600 miles in 1945 to 32,900 miles in 1997. Nationally, the Forest Service is now overwhelmed by more than 380,000 miles of roads, eight times larger than the entire Interstate highways system!

We who grew up here know that it is time to protect ALL of our few remaining public roadless wildlands in the Northern Rockies. Twenty-three years is long enough to wait: NREPA's time is now!

**Editor's Note:** At press time Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and the Obama Administration hung Idaho's roadless areas out to dry. Despite an announced one year "moratorium" on road-building in all other national forests (the moratorium already exists because the Clinton-era roadless rule is still in place), Idaho's roadless areas were left out because the "Idaho Rule" had already hit the books.



*Looking out from Grandmother Mountain Roadless Area*  
Will Boyd photo

## FRIENDS OF THE CLEARWATER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### SPRING 2009

#### *June 6, 7:30 a.m. Coastal Disjunct Hike*

Meet at Eastside Marketplace. Sponsored by the Idaho Native Plant Society, we will be heading to Three Rivers for the day! Bring lunch, water, & snacks.

#### *Sat., July 25, 3:00 p.m. Wolf Party*

The Wolf Education & Research Center in Winchester will be celebrating wolves in the Northern Rockies along with their allies. The celebration will include a naming ceremony for the on site Owyhee pack.

#### *Coeur d'Alene Salamander Workshop*

Wed., June 10, 7:00 p.m. at the Univ. of Idaho informational meeting and workshop to train citizen scientists to locate Coeur d'Alene salamanders and assist in testing for chytrid fungus. Read more "Summer Clearwater Happenings, page 6.

#### *August 8-9 Biomonitoring*

Wildland biomonitoring workshop to Chateau Falls (Pot Mtn. Roadless Area) with Dr. Fred Rabe. Stream surveys, plant ID, and expert presentations. Limited to 8 participants. Reserve your spot today!

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