

the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.”

To designate new sections of land as a Wilderness Area, it takes an act of Congress, as I mentioned before. Federal land management agencies - National Park Service, National Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service are required to recommend to Congress lands they believe qualify for wilderness designation on a state-

by-state basis. Congress then decides which areas to designate.

The Wilderness Act protects Congressionally-designated wilderness areas from roads, dams, or other permanent structures; from timber cutting and the operation of motorized vehicles and equipment; and, since 1984, from new mining claims and mineral leasing. However, mining operations and livestock grazing are allowed in areas where the activities existed prior to the designation. Traditional uses of the land are still permitted once designated, including hiking, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, and berry picking.

When Friends of the Scotchman Peaks was created in January of 2005, they were under the protective wing of the Cabinet Resource Group, based in Heron, Montana. The Cabinet Resource Group, a 501(c)(3) non-profit group, was established in 1976 with the mission to protect natural resources through education and action. They continually work on habitat issues in the Cabinet Mountains, the Yaak region, and the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille drainage in western Montana and northern Idaho.

In the last couple years, the Friends of Scotchman Peaks has gained more than 1,200 supporters, as well as endorsements from Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer, the cities of Sandpoint, Ponderay, and Thompson Falls, the Bonner County Commissioners, the mayor of Sandpoint, and more. Over three-quarters of their supporters reside in the general region, whether it be northwestern Montana, North Idaho, or northeastern Washington. They now have support coming from 27 states and three countries.

“A rugged landscape sculpted by glaciers and scoured by ancient floodwaters, this corner of the Kootenai National Forest is a worthy subject for wilderness designation,” wrote Brian Schweitzer in his letter of support. “Not only does it provide quality habitat for wildlife such as elk, mountain goats and grizzly bears, these remote mountains and valleys are also a source of pristine water flowing into the Kootenai River, the Clark Fork River, and Idaho’s Lake Pend Oreille.”

The last designation of a Wilderness Area was in January 2006, when President Bush signed the 100,000 acre Cedar Mountain Wilderness Area into law. The designation of the wilderness area has hindered the plans of a private company trying to create a high-level nuclear waste storage facility on the Goshute Indian Reservation, near the Cedar Mountains, though the Air Force is still allowed access for training.

Idaho has nearly 9 million acres of roadless, undeveloped National Forest land, more than any other state in the lower 48. Though that sounds like a lot, and some areas have been designated down south, no lands in North Idaho are currently protected. No new land has received wilderness designation in the state for 27 years.

To get involved with the Friends of the Scotchman Peaks, join them on one of their hiking trips (see sidebar), or see their website at www.scotchmanpeaks.org. Or, you could always attend the “Great Old Broads for Wilderness” event to be held July 26-30 that will feature hikes in the Scotchmans, speakers on wilderness efforts in Idaho and Montana, and a volunteer trail maintenance project with the U.S. Forest Service. The Friends will also be participating in Fourth of July parades in Sandpoint, Clark Fork, Heron, Noxon, and Troy, the Bonner County Fair, and the Huckleberry Festival. Stay tuned and be present!

Kate Wilson is the Project Journalist for Avista's Clark Fork Project. She has been interested in environmental issues since she was a youngster.

