

# *Scotchman Peaks deserve protection*

We're strong proponents of multiple use for public lands. We firmly believe there are needs and desires for recreation and commerce that can be met and done responsibly and collaboratively.

But in cases where one use clearly outweighs other activities, we believe government should move to protect that use.

One stellar example is the proposed Scotchman Peaks Wilderness area. The unique countryside covering 88,000 wild acres spanning the Montana and Idaho borders and withing part of Sanders County is clearly one area that deserves protection.

The area is one of the best preserved and largest areas of relatively undisturbed areas in northwest Montana. With rugged peaks, scenic vistas and old growth forests, it provides a welcome respite to recreationists and a glimpse into the past and how many of the nation's wildlands once appeared.

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It warrants protection.

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notable support on the local level and from many other groups. The last time it had solid Congressional support, was during the Reagan years. President Reagan effectively killed the wilderness bill that would have permanently protected the area with a pocket veto.

The chief advocates of wilderness status for the Scotchman Peaks, the Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, are making headway and by their connections, feel that the time may be near. Recent conversations with Montana's Congressional delegation and with those in Idaho, deemed critically important to the success of the effort have been positive.

On the state level, Montana's Governor Steve Bullock has publicly issued support for the designation of a new the wilderness area. So have public agencies and entities in Idaho.

Friends of the Scotchman Peaks talk of collaboration in their quest, not conflict, and we'll take them for their word. Part of the challenge in the past has been that environmentalists have been seen as the enemy in so many issues, trying to stop timber sales, mining efforts and other projects. That collective perception cast other related activities, no matter their merit, in a poor light.

That included support for the Scotchman Peaks.

We hope that attitude has changed and we'll have to believe, at least for this group, that it has and we trust them. Attitudes and approaches to natural resource use, whether it be for commercial gain or wildlands protection has to be a two way street. Some areas, and specifically the Scotchman Peaks, need and deserve protection. Some other areas clearly can be used for other uses.

The Scotchman Peaks area is clearly one of the crown jewels of the Rockies and the nation, an area that warrants protection so it can remain wild for many generations to enjoy.

We've said it before and it bears repeating. We enthusiastically and wholeheartedly support inclusion of the Scotchman Peaks area into the national wilderness system.