THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE


By David W. Keller
The Making of a Masterpiece:
The Stewardship History of the Rocky Mountain Front and
the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (1897-1999)
By David W. Keller

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2001096905
Published October 2001

Published in the United States of America
by the
Boone and Crockett Club
250 Missoula, MT 59801
Phone: (406) 542-1888
www.boone-crockett.org

Design and Layout: BENTON Ave. Graphic Design™ Helena, Montana
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Foreword

When stone-age hunters of the Late Pleistocene found their way to North America across the Bering Bridge and gradually dispersed to the south, one travel corridor was along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. Then as now, rhythms of life cycled with the seasons, and periods of drought and times of plenty visited the people. Changes that played across their landscape were gradual, perhaps perceptible only in the tales that storytellers told of distant generations.

When Theodore Roosevelt was born in 1858, there were 10 people and 17 bison per square mile in what was then the United States. When he entered the White House 42 years later, there were more than 25 citizens per square mile, and the last 20 to 40 wild bison were huddled in sanctuary inside Yellowstone National Park. The slaughter was not limited to the buffalo; all across the American portion of the continent it was wildlife's darkest hour. Montana's Rocky Mountain Front lay silent on the edge of that same abyss.¹

One hundred years after Theodore Roosevelt entered the White House in 1901, Montana's 'Front' and the wild lands to its west have become a showplace of what is possible in wildlife conservation. The history of this purposeful restoration and conservation crosses the boundaries of three to four human generations. This exceptional gift's history deserves to be carefully recorded and systematically taught.

When defending the national forest reserves, Roosevelt said:

"...the Westerners who live in the neighborhood of the forest preserves are the men who in the last resort will determine whether or not these preserves are to be permanent."²
This is the story of those 'Westerners' and what they did with a portion of the earth as it found its way to our time. It is a story intertwined with the ethic of landowners private and public. At times, the story is epic in its proportion, debated and decided in the Congress of the United States. It is a saga touched by the hands of presidents and held in the hands of farmers and ranchers working the land for more than a century. Mostly, however, it is the history of individuals in a society determined to preserve values held in common, determined to leave a rich legacy to their heirs, determined to nurture the life and land in their custody.

While native hunters walked these lands for well over ten thousand years, the conservation ethic reaching from Theodore Roosevelt to our time spans barely a century. Like our American democracy itself, the conservation of wildlife and wild land is a bold experiment. The outcome is already quite special and it is a story that needs to be told and taught. In the final analysis, the cultural will to sustain this conservation masterpiece will not reside in laws and regulations but in the hearts and traditions of the people. And those people will be as Roosevelt observed: "...the Westerners who live in the neighborhood of the forest."

Jim Posewitz
The Cinnabar Foundation

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What follows is an overview of conservation efforts in a particular place. As a subject of study, the history of conservation has been pursued most vigorously within the field of environmental history—a discipline that looks at various aspects of human-land relationships. Most of these conservation histories, however, have dealt with specific topics such as the railroad’s influence on the national parks or the origins of American wildlife policy. Far fewer have been about conservation in specific places, and those have dealt primarily with our high profile national parks and monuments.¹ There are no definitive conservation histories of any area in Montana except for Yellowstone and Glacier national parks.

The written history of Montana has most often focused on the state’s “settlement and exploitation” and virtually ignored its equally fascinating story of conservation.² It is a conspicuous absence considering that conservation has nearly the same time-depth as the pioneer epic, and considering the vast degree to which resource conservation has played a role in Montana’s history. Conspicuous too, because the resource base is both abundant and available. My cursory prying into the Rocky Mountain Front’s conservation history has revealed that although the details have not been assembled, they have been well recorded. They are found in newspaper and magazine articles, land and wildlife agency records and reports, journal articles, master’s theses and dissertations, and most importantly, in the minds of people (most of whom are still living).

My prying has revealed something else, too. This history is rich. Consider just the bare facts: it is a story that spans a century and deals with six different land or wildlife agencies, a tribal council, several major corporations, numerous private conservation organizations, and countless people. The land itself has been deemed as among the very best wildlife habitat remaining in the lower forty-eight states. It includes a national park, mostly roadless national forest lands, a 1.5-million-acre wilderness complex, and 33,000 acres of state wildlife management areas. Add to this an expanse of adjacent private land every bit as vital to the continued health of the Front’s wildlife and you have the ingredients for quite a story.

Despite the availability and variety of source material, the conservation story remains untold and, as a result, unincorporated into the state’s broader history. That is precisely the reasoning behind this document, which has been prepared for educators to develop a “teaching packet” and pilot the material in Choteau public schools. Ultimately the hope is to fold this little-discussed piece of Montana history into the statewide curriculum at the 4th and 8th grade levels.

I should stress that I have done little more than survey the conservation history of the Rocky Mountain Front; this paper is in no way definitive. Instead it offers a broad overview of some of the people and events that have played critical roles in shaping the area’s conservation
history. To the degree I was able, I interpreted their significance and placed them within the larger framework of United States and Montana conservation history. Of course, the analysis is strictly my own in the same way that my perspectives are mine alone. Although academic objectivity is a worthwhile goal, in its purest form it is unattainable. Assuming this, I have been more forthright about my personal biases simply because I believe it is a more honest approach to scholarship. Nevertheless, I assume full responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation.

Soon after I began this research I realized the only way this much material could be covered in any depth is in a book, one that I'm sure will be written someday, and for good reason. It will be written not simply for its academic value, but for its social value, because people need to know—deserve to know—especially those people on the front lines of the ongoing struggle to protect land and wildlife. And it will be written because we can all be proud of the Front's conservation legacy. It is the story of conscientious people struggling to protect something of value and creating in the process a true American conservation masterpiece.

There are great many people to whom I owe a considerable debt of gratitude. A very special thanks to Lisa Flowers and Bob Peebles who brought this project to my attention and provided invaluable assistance throughout. Many, many thanks to those who spent time educating me in their respective areas of expertise, a good number of whom also provided very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. They are Jim Posewitz, Gary Olson, Quentin Kjula, Tom Flowers, Gene Sentz, Bill Cunningham, Bert Goodman, Ira New Breast, Dave Hanna, Dave Carr, Mike Aderhold, Mike Hoggan, Chuck and Shaton Blixrud, and Keith and Leslie Shaw. Thanks also to Richard Newton, Robin Strathy, and Marie Crawford for help with valuable Forest Service resources. Thanks to Bill Jones, Larry and Anne Dellwo, and Carol Guthrie for allowing interviews that broadened my perspective. And thanks, finally, to the Peebles family for their extraordinary kindness and generosity, and to all my friends on the Rocky Mountain Front.

This project was made possible through generous funding by the Cinnabar Foundation; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (the Allan Foundation); the Forever Wild Endowment; and the Boone and Crockett Foundation.


2For example, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, considered the standard text on the state's history, has twenty entries in the index under "Agriculture" and forty under "Anaconda Copper Mining Co." On the other hand, the same book has no entries under "Conservation" or "Glacier National Park" and only one under "Bob Marshall Wilderness." See Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, Revised Edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).
Along the eastern flank of the Rocky Mountains in north-central Montana lies a vast and isolated stretch of country. Fiercely cold for months of each year and blasted by screaming winds, this largely unpopulated land has escaped the damage people have wrought upon most of our once untamed continent. Because the area is home to most of its historic native plants and animals, it is among the wildest country remaining in the lower forty-eight states.

We know it as the Rocky Mountain Front—a land of vertical, bare, stone mountains towering over rolling plains, a land of huge windswept skies and sparkling clean rivers. Its backbone is the Continental Divide, its heart the rough-fescue grasslands that hug the sheer walls of stone, its arteries the tributaries to the Missouri River.

The Front is also the seam of two entirely different ecosystems—the dry northwestern Great Plains and the moist, cooler Rocky Mountains. This merger of ecosystems, or ecotone, is a biological gold mine. Plains species mingle with mountain species: mule deer with mountain goats, antelope with bighorn sheep, wolverine with wolf. And because the Front remains largely unpeopled and undeveloped, it provides wildlife habitat big enough to support grizzly bears, whose home ranges can be as large as one hundred square miles or more. It is one of the last places in the contiguous states where grizzlies once again roam onto the plains, and one of the last places in the lower forty-eight outside of Yellowstone National Park where wolves and grizzlies and mountain lions share quarters. The larger Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (of which the Front is a part) is home to the largest contiguous population of mountain goats in the state and has some of the highest populations of grizzly, bighorn sheep, lynx, and wolverine south of Canada.

The 1.5-million acre Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex that covers the bulk of the inner mountains is considered the most ecologically healthy mountain wilderness in the entire country. Immediately to the east of the wilderness runs a strip of national forest land—86 percent of which is roadless, de-facto wilderness. Add to that a critical expanse of privately owned land, most of which remains covered in native flora. It is the integrity of these grasslands and limber pine savannas that have allowed most of the Front’s charismatic, signature wildlife species to flourish.

That the Front remains as wild as it does has much to do with the particular nature of its topography and weather. But its conservation has been anything but accidental. Rather, it has only been through the hard work and perseverance of highly dedicated people over the last century that the land and wildlife are in the shape they are today. Progress has not come about without a long and sometimes bitter fight. It is this struggle to maintain land and wildlife that makes the story that follows.
This paper is organized in a roughly chronological sequence and, beyond that, topically. The first section offers a general description of the natural history and characteristics of the Front and its wildlife, a sort of inventory of the place. The second section outlines briefly its human history from the perspective of how people have adapted to the land over time. The third and fourth sections—the body of the paper—are a survey of conservation efforts on the Front and surrounding wildlands over the last century and their context in relation to the evolution of conservation in Montana and North America.

1Mike Adenfield, Telephone interview by author, 17 December 1999.
Before Euroamericans arrived, this land of mountains and plains was home to the historic Blackfeet and their ancestors, a period of human habitation probably dating back thousands of years. Their name for the sheer stone walls that stretch skyward was *Mistakis*—or "the Backbone of the World." Our culture has known the area—or parts of the area—by a variety of names. In his effort to establish Glacier National Park, George Bird Grinnell (a turn-of-the-century ethnographer and conservationist) dubbed the heavily glaciated northern part of this region the "Crown of the Continent." As early as 1857 the rich rough-fescue grassland that extends in a strip along the base of the mountains from Montana far north into Canada was known as the "Fertile Belt." Today we know the United States portion of that grassland and the junction of mountains and plains as the Rocky Mountain Front.²

For centuries people have been amazed by the Front's abrupt topographical shift—from the horizontal to the vertical—in much the same way we are today. It is striking to us simply because there are few if any places where the plains-to-mountain seam is more distinct. Early accounts indicate that people have long taken note of this peculiar feature. In 1854 as part of the Northern Railroad surveys, James Dory wrote: "The mountains here [south of the Marias River] turned southwest and northeast, and, where terminating on the plain, they seem to have been cut off perpendicularly..."³ Twenty-five years later during the survey of the international border between the United States and Canada, W. J. Twinning noted as he neared the mountains: "I had been led to suppose that the ascent to the summit [of the Rocky Mountains] was a gradual slope, and was greatly surprised to find that the rolling prairie abutted sharply against an impassable escarpment of rocky precipices."⁴

Even more frequently, explorers made mention of the abundance of wildlife along the Front. After having spent almost a year west of the Continental Divide where game was scarce, Meriwether Lewis and his small party re-crossed the divide at Lewis and Clark Pass on July 7, 1806. In his journal, Lewis noted that his group was "much rejoiced at finding ourselves in the plains of the Missouri which abound with game."⁵ A week later, as the party rode northward from the Missouri River in hope of discovering the source of the Marias River, Lewis wrote of a landscape littered with bison, elk, deer, antelope, grizzlies, and wolves (along with many smaller mammals and birds). Sixty years later, Robert Fisk of the Sun River prospecting expedition, which camped near present-day Augusta, noted how "the Sun river abounds in game to a greater extent than any we have passed through coming from the states and our camp folks have been bountifully supplied with fresh game meats."⁶ Though the party had no trouble finding meat, they were not as fortunate in their efforts to find gold.

One of the most remarkable things about the Front today is that it hasn't changed very much since explorers rode beneath the mountains. Or doesn't appear to have changed. But, in
fact, it is a land that has experienced both boom and bust, and persevered. Much of what we enjoy here today is tied to the efforts of people dedicated to the perpetuation of wilderness and the protection of wildlife. These efforts have been coupled with the open spaces of agriculture, and because of this combination every animal that was here historically is here today. With very few exceptions the Front has required no wildlife re-introductions. By regulating some human activity and protecting the animals’ habitat, wildlife has been allowed to repopulate naturally. From an all-time low around the turn of the century, the native fauna has rebounded to the extent that today many species are probably more abundant than ever. The reasons that the Rocky Mountain Front was biologically rich in the past, and is once again, are manifold. But it all starts with the Front’s geologic story.

Overthrust Mountains and Glaciated Plains

About 200 million years ago the supercontinent of Pangaea (the combined continents of America, Europe, and Africa) began to split apart, creating the Atlantic Ocean. At the same time, the floor of the Pacific Ocean buckled and began to slide beneath the western margins of America into the earth’s interior. As the ocean floor pushed to a depth of around 60 miles, its upper crust melted and began to rise, forming an immense bulge on the continent’s land surface, including what is now northern Idaho and western Montana. Thousands of feet of layered sedimentary rocks—many of which dated to Precambrian times (the earliest geological era)—were raised and tilted upward, causing them to slowly and inexorably slide downhill towards the east, beginning about 70 million years ago. As each successively older rock layer peeled off the original stack, it slid over those that had peeled off earlier, in effect reversing the geological order—a unique quality of overthrust faulting. These huge rock slabs, pulled by the force of gravity, traveled as much as fifty miles from their place of origin, sliding eastward onto the plains over a period of about three million years.

The result was a series of unusually straight, north-to-south trending ridges and canyons. Each ridge is an outcrop of resistant rock, each valley the weathering of more erodable rock. The eastern faces of these mountains—known as the Sawtooth Range—now rise 2,000 to 4,000 feet above the level of the plains and have been eroded into sharp, barren peaks and serrated ridges. During the late Wisconsin glaciation (between 18,000 and 12,000 years ago), immense glaciers along the Continental Divide began to slide eastward. As the glaciers grew, they pushed beyond the mouths of the canyons. Remnant moraines tell us that the Sun River glacier pushed eight to ten miles onto the plains, the Teton glacier four to five miles, while smaller glaciers pushed out of Deep, Blackleaf, and Dupuyer canyons. It seems a continuous ice sheet stretched along the base of the mountains between Sheep Creek and Cut Bank Creek, extending as far as twelve to fifteen miles east of the mountains. In their wake the glaciers left behind characteristic U-shaped glacial valleys as they peeled rock from the canyons and carried it eastward under the awesome force of their weight.

While the topography of the plains immediately adjacent to the mountains was largely determined by the Cordilleran (mountain) glacial advances, the land further east was affected by the Laurentide (continental) advances of a huge ice sheet pushing southward out of Canada. This glacier covered much of present-day eastern Montana and North Dakota. Geologists believe there were at least four and possibly as many as 20 separate advances. Each advance redefined the landscape as glaciers slid across and scoured the land. Then, as the climate warmed again and the glaciers melted, floodwater did its own shaping through erosion. After the retreat of the last glaciers about 10,000 years ago, the landscape had been molded as we know it
now—nearly sheared peaks and scoured glacial valleys in the mountains, and on the plains, long eastward running plateaus separated by broad stream valleys. Elevations range from about 7,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level along the mountain summits to around 4,000 to 5,000 feet on the plains.9

Geological forces, then, are responsible for the foundation upon which everything else has been built—the soil, the flora, the fauna, and even localized weather patterns. This foundation is responsible for the biologically rich ecotone, this meeting place of different ecosystems that makes the Front such good habitat.

Soil: The Basis of Life

Soils are created by the effects of organic matter and climate upon parent material, which is mostly glacial till along the Front. The soil varies considerably from place to place, corresponding roughly to elevation zones and precipitation. The depth of the soil ranges widely—from almost none to as much as sixty inches. As a general rule, fertility tends to be less in the mountains and much greater along the transitional zone between the mountains and the mixed-grass prairie.10

Much of the mountainous terrain is comprised of barren rock or soils that are shallow and poorly developed, although the mountain valleys often have fertile soil of considerable depth. East of the mountains, three very general soil zones—north-to-south bands of soil types—grade into one another. Just below the mountains and for about two to five miles to the east, is the first strip; it is comprised primarily of moderately fertile gray-wooded soils which correspond with forestlands. Bordering the gray soil type is a zone of well-developed and highly fertile chernozem soils—rich in organic material—interspersed with slightly less fertile chestnut soils, both of which are characteristic of the fescue prairie. Further east, and as precipitation levels decline, this chernozem-chestnut strip grades into a third zone comprised of a mixture of chestnut and brown soils characteristic of the short- and mixed-grass prairie.11

A Wild and Windy Climate

Climate works in tandem with topography and soils to determine the life forms a place can support. On the Rocky Mountain Front, climate largely defines the character of the place. As if a monumental landscape and the complimentary wildlife weren’t enough, the climate here—in its variability and unpredictability, in its frigid winters, and especially in its savage winds—makes the Front one of the wildest places on the continent.

There is a multitude of reasons for the wind’s intensity, and foremost are the presence of the mountains with their particular architecture and the competing interests of two major westerly air flows. Another factor is due to an “edge effect” similar to that which creates the quality habitat. Two very different climatic zones come together here. Robert Bailey in his mapping project, *Ecoregions of the United States*, classified this area as the junction of two expansive and distinct “domains”—the largest geographic units he identified and defined as “areas of broad climatic similarity.” That the Front is the only place in the whole Great Plains-Rocky Mountain region where such a junction is found goes a long way toward explaining its unique weather patterns.12

On the ground, this means the Front is a relatively narrow zone where weather is going to be more variable and more erratic than elsewhere. As a general rule, the land east of the Continental Divide tends to get less rainfall, more dramatic temperature fluctuations, more sunshine, and a lower relative humidity than areas west of the divide. While precipitation can
be as much as 100 inches a year on some of the higher peaks in the interior, average precipitation drops sharply as one travels eastward—to only 12 inches some 20 miles out on the plains. Precipitation east of the mountains averages between 12 to 14 inches annually—about 80 percent of which falls as snow.

Temperatures along the east-to-west gradient vary much less than precipitation, although the plains tend to be warmer than the mountains. While summers are pleasantly warm—averaging around 67 degrees F. in July—they are brief. Winters, on the other hand, can be brutal and long. January temperatures average around 20 degrees, and several months of cold temperatures pull down the Front’s year-round average to 38 to 44 degrees. But averages do not show the whole picture. Wintertime temperatures can plunge to 60 below zero or lower.13

Even more than meager precipitation and frigid temperatures, the Front’s severe winds are probably its signature climatic feature. Strong westerly and southwesterly air flows can roar down the slopes with destructive intensity, reaching wind speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour. One of the best known winds, the warm chinook, typically blows stronger here than any other area of the state. Chinosks begin as moist air from the Pacific Ocean. As this air moves east, it is forced up and over the mountains, where precipitation releases stored heat. The warm and dry wind usually arrives 36 to 48 hours after invasions of cold Arctic air from the northwest, which happens several times each winter. Reaching speeds of 60 to 70 miles per hour, chinosks sweep eastward, rapidly raising temperatures on the plains. For example, in Great Falls on January 11, 1980, the temperature rose from 32 degrees below zero to 15 degrees above zero in just seven minutes. These warm, high-speed winds also clear the ground of snow, which provides important relief for wildlife such as deer and elk. In fact, chinook winds play a critical role in this ecosystem’s ability to support as much wildlife as it does.14

Though the general weather patterns we experience today seem almost written in stone, the climate along the Front has changed markedly over time. There have been ten major climatic episodes of varying duration over the last 10,000 years alone. Generally the trend has been towards warmer temperatures with one notable break known as the Neo-Boreal or “Little Ice Age,” which started around 400 years ago and lasted until about 150 years ago. One way climate shifts are measured is by changes in vegetation. Using pollen samples, a study on the northwestern plains revealed that the area east of the mountains has been primarily grassland for the last 12,200 years, although the grassland’s character, as well as that of the mountain forests, has changed and its extent has fluctuated. For example, sagebrush seems to have increased between 11,500 B.P. (before present) and 9,500 B.P., indicating a drier climate. Later pollen samples indicate a decrease in sagebrush and an increase in grasses. This suggests that after 9,500 B.P., there were either wetter conditions, a change in seasonal distribution of precipitation, or more frequent fires.15

Fire: The Grassland’s Ally

Fire has probably always been a key part of the natural processes affecting the Rocky Mountain Front. To use an ecological term, fire is a major “ecosystem engineer.” Like many biological communities, the Front is adapted to—and actually requires—fire to maintain its historic vegetative character. Fire assists plant succession and helps to recycle nutrients. In fact, certain endemic species, such as aspen, depend upon fire to maintain their vigor. Yet fire’s effect of expanding the grassland is its most significant contribution to the Front’s overall habitat quality. By killing trees that would otherwise compete for sunlight and moisture, fire provides growing space for grasses and forbs so critical for much of the wildlife. At the same time, fire increases habitat diversity by creating mosaics of burned and unburned areas.16
In the last ten thousand years, anthropogenic—or human-caused—fire has bolstered fire's role in this ecosystem. Fire was the single-most powerful tool of prehistoric peoples, and on the Front, where human ignitions coincided with severe local winds, this was especially true. Burning improved the forage quality of hunting areas, maintained more open timber stands, cleared campsites and trails, encouraged the growth of certain food plants (specifically berry producing shrubs), and reduced the threat of catastrophic fire. Tree core samples along with historic accounts suggest that many areas along the Front burned an average of once every 22 years.\(^{17}\)

From an ecological perspective, the effects of fire suppression since Euroamerican settlement have been problematic. Suppression has led to many unexpected results, the most obvious being tree encroachment. Lodgepole pine and limber pine in particular now cover slopes that, as late as the turn-of-the-century, were covered with only grasses. Grassland communities are being squeezed out, which decreases wildlife forage. Additionally, without the mosaic effect of fire, vegetation becomes increasingly homogenous, and species such as aspen become “decadent” or overgrown, resulting in a decline in their vigor. Of more concern to land managers, however, is the fact that fire suppression has led to dense vegetative growth and an accumulation of dead wood that invites fires of catastrophic proportions (such as those that raged in 1988). These facts have led land agencies such as the Forest Service to reconsider fire suppression policies. Today some wildfires are allowed to burn, and controlled fire is being used as a tool to check tree encroachment and reduce the threat of major conflagrations.\(^{18}\)

Plant Life: The Keystone of Diversity

Geology, soil, climate, and fire have shaped the vegetation on the Rocky Mountain Front, which, because it is an ecotone with a variety of elevations, has more species-diversity than areas to the east or west (and probably to the south). Three major vegetative communities come together here: the western edge of the northern mixed-grass prairie, the eastern edge of the Northern Rockies, and the southwestern tip of the great rough-fescue prairie that extends in a huge crescent through Canada. Plants from each of these large communities meet along the Front and mix to create an ecosystem all their own.

A hike from the highest peaks along the Continental Divide eastward down successive cliffs and plateaus to the treeless plains far below will bring a person in contact with a diverse cross-section of plants. At timberline (around 8,000 feet above sea level) you will find tightly matted, ground-creeping shrubs and forbs and stunted forms of sub-alpine fir and white-bark pine. Continue downslope and between about 7,000 and 5,000 feet you will walk through cool forests of sub-alpine fir, spruce, and lodgepole pine along with beargrass-covered meadows. Below 5,000 feet, limber pine and Douglas-fir predominate until the trees eventually grade into the rough-fescue grasslands.\(^{19}\)

Extending several miles east of the mountains is the rolling, rough fescue-limber pine savanna dotted occasionally with dense, dome-shaped aspen groves. Rivers flow through broad valleys, their winding courses marked by the growth of willow, birch, and cottonwood. Chokecherry and wood rose grow in dense thickets across valley slopes. In a few scattered locations along the Front one can find a unique type of wetland—called a “fen”—that outside of Canada is found only here. Further out on the plains, and as precipitation levels decline, the savanna landscape grades into a treeless rough-fescue prairie. Rough fescue provides abundant summer forage and is highly nutritious year-round, placing it among the most significant habitats for native ungulates. Some 10 to 15 miles east of the mountains, the fescue grasslands eventually grade into the grama, needlegrass, and wheatgrass of the northern mixed-grass prairie, which continues eastward for hundreds of miles.\(^{20}\)
Wildlife: Setting the Standard

Increasingly over the years, the Rocky Mountain Front has come into the spotlight for its spectacular wildlife. The presence of high profile animals such as grizzlies and wolves as well as staggering populations of mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep has earned it national recognition. These are unquestionably some of the most biologically intact areas remaining in the lower forty-eight states, and the whole array of pre-settlement animals are here. One inventory by the Lewis and Clark National Forest revealed more than 290 wildlife and fish species, including 72 mammals, 190 birds, 7 reptiles, 8 amphibians, and 13 fishes.\textsuperscript{21} Even small herds of bison, although restricted in their movements, once again roam portions of the Front, including one herd on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and others on several privately owned ranches.\textsuperscript{22}

Actual biodiversity (meaning the number of different species) along the Front is not as great as many areas in more southerly latitudes (species richness increases as you get closer to the equator), but the biological integrity of the Front is unparalleled. All the species that were here historically are here now, at least the ones we typically think of, and many of them are rarely found elsewhere in the contiguous United States. Three of them—the gray wolf, grizzly, and lynx—are on the endangered species list. Another, the swift fox, is a species that may be added to the list. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has identified twelve wildlife species on the Front as species “of special concern,” including the rare wolverine. The presence of such wildlife serves as evidence for both the biological integrity and the expansiveness of the Front's wildlands. These facts have not been lost on recreationists or researchers.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to the threatened, endangered, or rarely seen predators on the Front, there are a whole host of other predators. Of them, the mountain lion and black bear are the largest. Smaller predators—and more commonly seen—are the bobcat, coyote, red fox, badger, raccoon, marten, mink, river otter, and weasel. Taken together, predators fill an essential niche in the ecosystem. They also help keep populations healthy by weeding out the sick and old.\textsuperscript{24}

The Front is home to numerous prey species that not only provide predators with sustenance, but also serve important if less recognized roles in influencing vegetative diversity and health. The largest of the Front's prey species is no longer a free-ranging member of the ecosystem. Bison have returned to the Front only in captivity, and their once expansive role in the local ecology has been more or less taken over by domestic livestock. The second largest prey species, the Shira's moose, resides mostly in the northern portion of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem in high-elevation basins or along swampy lakehores. Moose are not found in great numbers, although it is believed populations have increased in the last ten years.

Montana hunters most often associate the Front with elk, which is one of the state's most favored quarries. The Front's elk population is estimated at around 3,000 animals that roam across more than 205,000 acres of land. The herds make annual migrations from mountain summer ranges to foothill winter ranges where they can be found in concentrated numbers, most notably along the Sun River.\textsuperscript{25}
Mule deer are also migratory and can be found on a number of smaller winter ranges along the Front. At population highs, they are more abundant than elk, and they are believed to number somewhere around 5,000 animals. A small population of white-tailed deer also lives along the Front. The expansion of trees and shrubs on the plains as a result of fire suppression along with agricultural practices have encouraged the spread of white-tailed deer from the west, leading to a gradual population increase. Bighorn sheep are another major wildlife species, and the Sun River bighorn herd, at around 600-700 animals, is the largest in the lower forty-eight states. Sheep summer mostly between the Continental Divide and Castle Reef, and winter on at least nine different ranges along the Front. There are scores of less recognized though common prey species along the mountain interface, including whistling and hoary marmots, porcupines, woodchucks, beaver, muskrats, chipmunks, pikas, snowshoe hares, Nuttall's cottontails, and Colombian ground squirrels.26

Bird life is equally diverse and abundant. The bald eagle as well as the endangered peregrine falcon are found here, at least seasonally. Bald eagles are commonly seen along the major drainages during spring and fall migrations (the Front is a major migration corridor), and sometimes as many as 20 eagles winter along Sun River. Peregrine falcons, though rare, are occasionally seen during seasonal migrations.27 Other raptors include golden eagles, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, northern goshawk, American kestrel, merlin, prairie falcon, northern harrier, boreal owl, northern saw-whet owl, long-eared owl, short-eared owl, great horned owl, great gray owl, eastern screech owl, northern pigmy owl, and the ubiquitous turkey vulture. There are a great number of songbirds, the most frequently encountered being the common raven, American robin, brown-headed cowbird, black capped chickadee, hermit thrush, Swainson's thrush, Cassin's finch, dark-eyed junco, gray jay, black-billed magpie, Clark’s nutcracker, American dipper, Townsend’s solitaire, American pipit, yellow rumped warbler, fox sparrow, chipping sparrow, ruby-crowned kinglet, western tanager, pine siskin, and warbling vireo.28

The Rocky Mountain Front is known for its clean streams and high-quality fisheries. Although non-native rainbow trout and brook trout were at one time introduced and have been found to hybridize with native species, there are still remnant populations of genetically pure native westslope cutthroat trout and arctic grayling. But because the exotic fish compete with the natives, the latter's range has been greatly reduced. As a result, these two species are being watched closely by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and efforts are under way to expand their populations back to pre-disturbance levels.

Our conception of the Front as a wildlife paradise, as the standard to which other wildlife areas are compared, has been shaped not so much by the variety of different species as by the number of individuals within a species. The abundance of charismatic megafauna and the presence of so many rare and endangered species indicate both habitat health and habitat availability. As long as we continue to encourage these species to flourish, the Front will remain one of the last bastions of primitive wildness in this country. If these species are lost, we will have wasted more than 100 years of dedicated conservation efforts.
Section II
Human Adaptation Through Time

The Rocky Mountain Front has been swayed by human influences for at least 10,000 years and probably longer. During the first human migration to America—thought to have occurred around 12,000 years ago—the Rocky Mountain Front likely formed a gateway for nomadic people moving south into what is now the United States. Geologists believe the mountain glaciers pushing out of the canyons along the Rocky Mountain Front and the vast Keewatin continental ice sheet extending southward out of Canada may not have met during the latter part of the Wisconsin glaciations, leaving an ice-free corridor east of the mountains. Eurasian people crossing the exposed land bridge between Siberia and Alaska would have been able to continue southward between the two glacial advances. This gateway would have broadened near present-day Great Falls to reveal a vast wilderness—a cool grassland-spruce savanna crawling with mammoths and mastodons and giant bison. Never again would America be the fierce and feral place that it was then, in the Pleistocene. Things were about to change.

These first Americans, known to us only by the fluted spear-points they used, subsisted on Ice-Age megafauna for more than 500 years. Then a period of massive animal extinctions swept across the continent. Many scientists believe these extinctions were the result, at least in part, of human hunting pressure. (The huge animals of the Pleistocene had evolved in the absence of human beings, the most effective predators on the planet.) If people caused the extinctions, then it was the first human-caused ecological collapse on the continent. But the extinctions also helped create a single species ascendency that had no precedent on the Great Plains and perhaps not even in the world.

Over the course of thousands of years after the extinctions and under hunting pressure, bison evolved into a smaller species, making up for lack of size by sheer abundance. The continent's bison population grew to tens of millions, spreading across the plains and spilling into mountain valleys and forest meadows. Their abundance and their susceptibility to primitive hunting allowed the formation of a human subsistence strategy that sustained people on the Great Plains for ten thousand years.

By at least 8,000 years ago, communal bison hunting was a well-established way of life. It was a resilient human-land relationship, an adaptation that withstood the rigors of many episodes of environmental and technological change. The thrusting spear evolved into a projectile with the advent of the atlatl, or spear thrower, probably around 7,500 years ago or earlier. The first organized stampeding of bison over cliffs emerged around 5,700 years ago, and pemmican technology (which allowed for long-term storage of meat) was widespread by 4,800 years ago. The bow and arrow appeared in the archaeological record 1,800 years ago, attended by a sharp rise in human populations and more sophisticated, complex cultures.

Throughout these various technological shifts, humans and bison remained within some
sustainable dynamic equilibrium. Life and livelihood persisted. But despite the apparent quality of this prehistoric adaptation to a resource, there was nothing to prepare it for the changes brought by the Euroamerican invasion. Foremost were new diseases, which are thought to have wiped out as much as 90 percent of the native populations and which swept through the Northwestern Plains at least four times. The arrival of the European horse, which reached the Blackfeet through trade or warfare sometime around 1730, also changed their lives dramatically. New technology acquired by native peoples through the fur trade—particularly firearms, ammunition, and liquor—proved to be perhaps the most damaging of all, because it was aimed at their life support, the bison.

Once the Blackfeet (and most other tribes on the Northwestern Plains, as well as the Métis, or mixed bloods) became major suppliers of bison robes for the Euroamerican trade around 1830, their long-established relationships with the land, the resources, and to each other were interrupted. Instead, a vicious new cycle strangled the basis of their historic livelihood. Between 1847 and 1870, 20,000 bison robes per year were shipped out of Fort Benton. By the 1870s as the trade grew to a frenzied pace, the yearly robe export soared to 70,000. But by 1884 the robe trade came to an abrupt halt as the last of the bison were slaughtered. During the winter of 1883-84 nearly a quarter of the Blackfeet people starved. A way of life that had sustained native people for more than 10,000 years had vanished in a biological instant.

The extermination of bison and subsequent confinement of the Blackfeet Nation to reservations opened the lower two-thirds of the Rocky Mountain Front to settlement by Euroamericans. Native prairies that had evolved over millennia with bison were now available for a different purpose. Sheep and cattle were brought into the Augusta area as early as the 1860s, and James Gibson pushed a herd to the Teton River in 1873 (illegally because land north of Sun River was still part of the Blackfeet Reservation until 1874). In the early days of ranching on the Front (as elsewhere), most of the land was used as a commons and became overstocked and overgrazed. As a result, the practice of open-range ranching came crashing down within years of having emerged. The severe winter of 1886-87, along with already depleted forage and poor herd health, created a regional disaster. In many areas of Montana, 90 percent of the livestock perished. Subsequently, ranchers began making adjustments to reduce the inherent risks. Pastures were fenced, hay was put up for winter, and herd sizes were adjusted closer to the land’s true carrying capacity.

As ranchers moved into the area, fledgling towns popped up along the Front. The Augusta area began to be settled as early as 1864. Dupuyer was settled in 1877, Choteau in 1883, and Bynum one year later. The growing local population, as well as urban centers such as Great Falls and Helena, put pressure on forest resources. Many people made their living supplying wild meat, furs, and timber to the nearby markets. Several small Métis settlements along the Teton and Smith rivers supported themselves by timbering, hunting, and trapping. Livestock grazed mountain valleys, especially the broad, open valley of the North Fork of the Sun. These various pressures began to reduce wildlife populations to remnants of their former size. It would take the efforts of many dedicated individuals over the next century to restore them.

With passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 (which doubled the allowed acreage to 320 acres), came many that would exploit the land. Droves of land-hungry settlers, many lacking farming experience and none of who understood local environmental limitations, arrived across the northwestern plains by the thousands. Between 1910 and 1920, the population density of Teton and Pondera counties jumped almost 200 percent. But because the best lands were already taken, the newcomers were forced to scramble for what remained. By the end of the decade, 69 percent of the available land in the two counties had been claimed. Much of
what these hopeful farmers plowed was hardly even decent range land, much less farmland, and what little prosperity they experienced did not last long. Widespread drought began in 1919 and occurred intermittently over the next two decades. The drought, combined with a collapsed wheat market, forced most farmers to abandon their land. Only their small one-room shacks dotting hundreds of half-sections across the Front remain.

Ranching and farming as lifeways have persisted only by making major adjustments. Perhaps the most important has been a steady increase in the size of ranches and farms and a decrease in the rural population. But there have been a host of others, including a much greater reliance on machinery. Current trends indicate that agriculture on the Rocky Mountain Front—as in most places in the West—is still in a state of flux. Though modified and more stabilized, agriculture continues to struggle for its existence.

1This section follows my Master's thesis, An Environmental History of the Rocky Mountain Front (M.A. Thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, 1996.)
Section III
Land and Wildlife Conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front: Montana’s Conservation History

The earliest focused conservation efforts in Montana were directed at the state’s wildlife and were borne out of a very justified concern. The bison slaughter had been so swift and final that many citizens were alarmed—there was every reason to believe the rest of the wildlife would follow if something wasn’t done. Laws patterned after conservation efforts in eastern states began to be passed that ultimately allowed wildlife to recover. At the same time, the federal government had shifted from a policy of land disposal to a program of land retention. That critical turn-around allowed the western states to retain one of their most valuable qualities: their wildness. Mostly because of the national forests and national parks, we also have wilderness areas—places where people can go (but cannot remain) to escape the civilized and mechanized world, to soothe their minds and restore their spirits.

It took acts of the federal government to set aside land to be held in trust for the people of the United States. But it has frequently taken local people to protect those lands from forces that would change the land’s nature. The evolution of land and wildlife conservation here has involved a complicated interplay of a variety of competing interests. But there have always been people on the ground who have played primary roles in the direction conservation has taken. This is mostly their story.

The Birth of Conservation in Montana

The first steps towards conservation in the United States were taken in reaction to the destruction of land and wildlife that accompanied our colonization of the continent. In settling America, and particularly the American West, people were driven by ideas of the endless abundance of land and resources. The land seemed boundless, the wildlife innumerable and imperishable. And resources seemed free for the taking—never mind the native peoples who were already there. To conquer the continent and harvest its richness, we believed, was our “manifest destiny.”

The 1803 Louisiana Purchase suddenly opened a vast new territory to Americans. Following close on the heels of the Lewis and Clark expedition, wave after wave of people washed westward. First they came for beaver pews and when that played out (within a short thirty years), there were bison robes and gold and silver. Ranching and farming closely followed. Towns followed. Land was practically given away under the various land laws. The rife exploitation of the time, the decadent wastefulness, led social historian Vernon L. Parrington to title the period “the Great Barbecue.”

Before we realized what had happened, there was little new land left to exploit. Within a brief 87 years of opening the West, the Census Bureau announced that the American frontier was closed. We’d washed over the land with the force of a tidal wave. Every square foot of the
new country had been probed for riches. Yet the land wasn’t settled. People had come mostly to get rich, not to stay. Once a resource had played out, people moved on.3

In the wake of our efforts we had lost whole species, destroyed habitat, lost much of our forests, and dirtied our streams. By 1830 the beaver was nearly extinct; in 1840 the last great auk was chopped up for fishing bait. Some thirty million bison had been slaughtered for their tongues and hides until less than a thousand remained. And in 1914, at the Cincinnati Zoological Garden, the last of the once countless passenger pigeons quietly died.4

The decimation of our nation’s wildlife became a rallying cry for early conservationists. These first American conservationists were, with few exceptions, sport hunters who had come from the nouveau riche of industrial America. They were among the first to notice the decline in wildlife and, realizing that unrestricted market hunting was the main culprit, were the first to do something about it.5

Sport hunters started to organize. The New York Sportsmen’s Club, founded in 1844, was perhaps the first such group to involve themselves in politics. Their purpose was simple. They would oppose market hunting and the spring shooting of birds while promoting the passage of game laws. The club drafted a model game law and introduced it to county officials. The law limited the taking of deer, ruffed grouse, quail, trout and woodcock to specific seasons. The bill was passed in 1846 and the club members took it upon themselves to enforce the new law: offenders were caught with the use of hired detectives and promptly sued. By the 1850s other clubs with similar goals developed in many of the larger eastern cities, and with them sprouted the seed of wildlife conservation.6

The most effective of these early sportsmen’s groups was founded in New York City in 1887. At the suggestion of Theodore Roosevelt at a dinner meeting he called together, he and his invited guests founded the Boone and Crockett Club. The club was primarily dedicated to ethical hunting (in the spirit of “fair chase”), to the preservation of large game, to restoring wildlands, and “to promoting inquiry into” the natural history of wildlife. Made up of influential men, the club was to figure critically in the emerging conservation movement. Over the next several decades, club members would champion wildlife laws, aid in the establishment of conservation institutions, and urge the protection of wildlands.7

Early conservation in Montana, like other western states, imitated efforts developing in the East. But it was also progressive despite being on the far fringes of our developing national culture. In fact, Montana ultimately ended up with some of the strongest environmental laws in the nation, starting with an unpretentious little bill passed by the Territorial Legislature and signed by the governor in 1865. Introduced by Deer Lodge County representative James Stuart, the bill allowed that fishing tackle may only consist of a pole, line, and hook, thus prohibiting the wasteful use of seines and dynamite to catch fish “by the wagonload.” Though it was a pretty basic measure, it reflected the growing concern for wildlife and the realization that it may often be the government’s responsibility to provide for its protection. James and his brother Granville Stuart, early pioneers, ranchers, and influential legislators, were also Montana’s first conservationists. They were in an advantageous position to understand the need for restraint for they were among the boomers busy exploiting the state’s resources. But at the same time, the Stuarts abhorred the wasteful slaughter of wildlife that was occurring around them. Throughout Montana’s territorial years they would play key roles in the development of conservation laws.8

The second attempt at legislating wildlife laws was brought to the table in 1869 when Nathaniel Boswell introduced a bill that would have prohibited killing several species of big game and some birds during their gestation. But the bill was trimmed down to provide
protection for only two game birds—closing the season on quail and partridge for three years. In 1872 Granville Stuart introduced a more sweeping bill. It codified previous laws, provided protection for songbirds, and closed the hunting season from February 1 through August 15 on “mountain buffalo, moose, elk, black-tailed deer, white-tailed deer, mountain sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, antelope and hare.” Signed into law, this very fundamental restriction—forbidding hunting during birthing and raising young—was a major step up the conservation ladder. Granville introduced yet another bill that passed in 1877, somewhat altered, that extended protection to furbearers and migratory waterfowl. Critically, it also prohibited killing animals “for the purpose of procuring the hide only.”

The implications of Stuart’s bill were great for such a law could have turned the tide on the buffalo slaughter and made Montana forever an exemplar in American wildlife policy. The reason it didn’t, and the reason that none of the wildlife laws had much effect in Montana’s territorial years, is that there were no provisions for enforcing the laws. Game wardens were not authorized until 1889, and only four counties out of twenty-four had appointed wardens by the turn of the century. Not only were these early laws not enforced, they were largely unenforceable. Market hunting as well as the robe trade had become so ingrained that nothing less than an army could stop the killing. Simply the inertia of the frenzied trade brought it to its logical conclusion.

Still, several very important wildlife laws continued to be passed by Montana’s territorial legislature and two more of them were aimed at the robe trade. Edward G. Brooke introduced a well-meaning but futile bill that passed in 1879 protecting buffalo for ten years in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Deer Lodge, and Madison counties. But to try and save the great herds, it was too little too late. The peak year of the slaughter, when 75,000 hides were shipped out of Fort Benton, had passed three years earlier. In another four years, Benton’s annual shipment of hides would plummet to 5,000.

Granville, in his well-known memoir Forty Years on the Frontier, described some of the dramatic changes he witnessed during those years in eastern Montana:

_In 1880 the country was practically uninhabited. One could travel for miles without seeing so much as a trapper’s bivouac. Thousands of buffalo darkened the rolling plains. There were deer, antelope, wolves and coyotes on every hill and in every ravine and thicket. ... In the fall of 1883 there was not one buffalo remaining on the range and the antelope, elk, and deer were indeed scarce._

Stuart was exaggerating, but not by much. And the sentiment he expressed was probably widespread among the political assembly. In 1889, six years after the slaughter had ended, the Legislature passed the last of the bison bills. It simply made it illegal to kill them for ten years anywhere in the territory. By that time, it was the only thing left for them to do.

In the same year the last bison law passed, and the same year Montana gained statehood, the legislature finally passed a law providing for game wardens. Similar bills had been introduced as early as 1883 but never made it through the legislative process. The passage of the bill was an important first step towards an enforcement program even though it was largely ineffective. Each county was authorized to appoint a game warden but only after 100 resident taxpayers petitioned the county commissioners, who then were to decide if it represented “the best interests of the county.” The system simply didn’t work. One reason was that county commissioners were not generally inclined to make such a decision and very few did.
There was little else accomplished until 1895, when three very important bills became law. These bills ushered in a new era in Montana wildlife conservation. First, the legislature authorized a board of Game and Fish Commissioners, charging them with overseeing “the enforcement of all laws of the State for the preservation and propagation and protection of game and fish.” Significantly, a second bill passed that gave the new board the power to appoint game wardens to any county presenting a petition signed by a minimum of 100 residents—a much more effective system. The third bill set the first bag limits on large game species in the state. Granted, they were not particularly stringent limits (individuals were limited to “only” two bull moose, three bull elk, one hundred grouse or prairie chickens, and eight deer, sheep, Rocky Mountain goats, or antelope). But it was a start.15

Arguably the most important of all the early wildlife conservation laws passed in 1897. This bill prohibited the sale of game birds and animals. Until this time, market hunting had ravaged wildlife populations. Along the Rocky Mountain Front, as across the state, wild game was hunted professionally to feed the growing mining towns across Montana. Closed seasons and bag limits were not enough. To protect wildlife from the resource-hungry marketplace, this practice had to be outlawed. Although it was an imitation of eastern laws, Montana—unlike those eastern states—still had some wildlife to protect.16

As with wildlife law, Montana also mimicked another eastern convention—the sportsmen’s club. Such groups became as important to conservation in Montana as they did anywhere. The Helena Rifle Club, organized in 1877, was the first. Granville Stuart served as secretary and, later, president for the club, whose stated purpose was for “protecting and enforcing game laws.” Like in the east, these clubs were composed of mostly wealthy, often politically influential, men who hunted for leisure. They were ranchers, merchants, bar and hotel owners, doctors. Similar groups organized in most of Montana’s largest cities: Bozeman, Missoula, Butte, Deer Lodge, Billings, and Great Falls. Many smaller communities also could boast sportsmen’s clubs—by 1915 there were active rod and gun clubs in both Choteau and Augusta. Taken together, they would come to figure prominently in Montana conservation.17

The genesis of Montana’s wildlife laws reflected people’s concern over a very real problem. Hunting and trapping along the Rocky Mountain Front between 1870 and 1910, along with the introduction of exotic diseases and displacement of native species by livestock, took a major toll on wildlife populations. The larger prey species were the first to go. Although in 1870 the Sun River area was reported to support a large elk population, only ten years later elk were perceived as growing scarce. Some hide hunters and traders had turned their attention from the dwindling bison herds to Rocky Mountain Front elk. The area also became a source for meat for the U.S. Army at Fort Shaw and later for railroad crews. There also were a growing number of local subsistence hunters such as the Métis. At the same time, livestock began to be driven into the area. As grass became increasingly scarce on the foothills, livestock were driven into the mountain valleys where they competed for forage directly with elk. This combination of pressures had such an effect on wildlife that by 1885 area residents believed the game herds had been reduced to a fragment of their former size.18

Elk were perhaps the most obvious animals in decline but they were not the only ones. Hunting pressure and displacement had also affected other large game species such as deer and bighorn sheep, and trapping was reducing furbearer populations. In his 1899 survey of the Lewis and Clark Forest Reserve, H. B. Ayres noted that “east of the mountains large game has been hunted until a track is seldom found. In the center of the reserve, however, are elk, moose, goats, sheep, black- and white-tailed deer, and the several species of bear common in the Rocky Mountains.”19 But the mountains provided refuge for only a short while as people pushed
further and further into the mountain interior. In two separate month-long trips through the reserve in 1905 and 1906, Forest Service employee Elers Koch reported, "no game... though we ate grouse nearly every day, knocking their heads off with our .30-.30 rifles."20

By the time Koch rode through the mountains along the Front, the situation was indeed grave. The formation of Montana's wildlife policy was slow, and in the early days, ineffective. Yet from that all-time low, wildlife populations would ultimately rebound. It would take, however, most of a century and the passage of some critical legislation before land and wildlife were restored to the levels we often take for granted today.

The Establishment of the Lewis and Clark National Forest

Undoubtedly the most significant event in wildlands conservation of the Rocky Mountain Front took place in Washington D.C. in 1897 when President Grover Cleveland signed the proclamation establishing the "Lewis and Clarke Forest Reserve." Upon this reserve, nearly every other federal conservation achievement would be based. The act authorizing the President to set aside such reserves had passed Congress in 1891 as a rider to the Sundry Civil Service Act. The rider provided that the President may "set apart and reserve... any part of the public lands wholly or in part covered with timber or undergrowth whether of commercial value or not, as public reservations." Because the act also repealed the failed Timber Culture Act, it represented a significant shift in federal policy from land disposal to land retention.21

The sentiment that led to the Forest Reserve Act, as it is also known, already had a history spanning nearly three decades. In the years following the War for Independence, eastern forests in the public domain were falling by ax and saw as quickly as industry could fell them. There were neither laws against it nor even a provision for compensation. Within 50 years in Michigan alone, sawmills had processed all but four percent of the state's timber—some six billion board feet. In the wake of this great timber theft, huge fires consumed the dead wood left behind and, without ground cover, whole hillsides washed away. The 1871 Peshtigo Fire in Wisconsin burned over a million acres and killed more than 1,500 people. Streams swelled with silt-laden floodwater. Whole fisheries collapsed.22

In 1864 a foreign diplomat, architect, and historian by the name of George Perkins Marsh released a book that had a profound effect on the coming conservation movement. *Man and Nature*, considered to be the first environmental history, dealt with topics such as the fall of ancient societies, the extinction of species, and, significantly, the relationships between vegetation, slope, and erosion. Dr. Franklin Hough, who had read Marsh's book carefully, helped convince the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to petition President Grant, asking him to authorize an advisor on forest affairs. Grant honored the request and Hough himself was appointed to the post in 1876. The organization he built over the next several years ultimately evolved into the Forest Service.23

Around the same time, the American Forestry Association—led by Dr. Bernard E. Fernow—with the help of the AAAS and the Boone and Crockett Club, began to push for congressional forest protection. Their combined efforts helped convince Secretary of Interior John W. Noble to request that the Forest Reserve amendment be added to the Sundry Civil Service Act. The amendment, nested as it was in an unrelated bill, was able to slip through both houses of Congress. It was a lucky event, for had it not been a rider to a little discussed bill, chances are good it would not have passed. President Harrison signed the bill into law and by the end of his term he had set aside 13 million acres of public land as the very first forest reserves.24

To inventory potential additions to the forest reserve system, in 1896 at the request of the Secretary of the Interior, the National Academy of Science's Forestry Commission conducted a
tour of western forests, including the mountains that would become the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Among the seven in attendance was Gifford Pinchot, who would play a critical role in the future of the forest reserves. There is no record of Pinchot’s reaction to the Front although Forest Service employee Elers Koch recalled that he was less than ecstatic about the horse he had been given to ride. One morning it nearly sent him flying, leading Pinchot to refer to the horse for the rest of the day through a string of expletives. Nevertheless, Pinchot and the commission returned unscathed to recommend that the president add some 21 million acres to the already existing forest reserves. On February 22, 1897—ten days before he left office—President Cleveland signed his name to the papers. Among those reserves were the Flathead and Lewis and Clarke. The proclamation announced:

that there is hereby reserved from public entry or settlement and set apart as a Public Reservation all those certain tracts, pieces or parcels of land lying and being situated in the State of Montana, and within the boundaries particularly described as follows . . .

Warning is hereby expressly given to all persons not to enter or make settlement upon the tract of land reserved by this proclamation.26

The newly established Lewis and Clarke Reserve was vast, covering nearly three million acres—larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined. Roughly, the boundary ran “from the southern edge of the Blackfeet reservation, between Ranges eight and nine, straight south to Lewis and Clark pass, thence westward as far as the headwaters of the Jocko River, thence northward across the ridgeline of the Mission Mountains and beside the eastern edge of Flathead Lake up to present West Glacier, thence eastward roughly along the Great Northern Railroad line to the Blackfeet Reservation and the place of beginning.”27

A certain part of the reserve was a strip of land that later would become the subject of great controversy—the northeastern corner that had been “purchased” from the Blackfeet tribe in 1896. Under pressure from copper mining interests, the United States paid the Blackfeet $1.5 million dollars for the mountain and foothill region comprising the eastern section of the reservation. The northern section of this “ceded strip” was added to the Flathead Reserve (which included what is now Glacier National Park), the southern half added to the Lewis and Clarke, and the whole of it opened to mining. But the expected bonanza didn’t pan out. Though some copper ore was extracted and traces of oil were found near Kintla Lake, none of the deposits proved profitable and by 1902 most mining activity had ceased. Though a few miners stayed to hunt and trap and a few homesteaded, the majority moved on to more promising areas. Because the purchase had been made under suspect conditions, it would figure prominently in future debates involving a host of wilderness and mineral leasing issues and even the treaty’s validity.28

The statutory protection afforded the expansive mountainous area we now call the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem set the stage for nearly every other conservation issue that would develop along the Front over the next century. But the news did not receive an enthusiastic applause from Montanans. Because the proclamation made no allowances for use, and even forbade entry into the forests—areas that locals were accustomed to using freely—many were furious. Headlines in the Great Falls Tribune blared, “Forestry Reserves Is [sic] Unsatisfactory.”29 A Billings rancher wrote to a Boone and Crockett Club friend explaining the sentiment: “The western settlers are peculiar people and insanely jealous of what they call interference with their rights by the East. A perfect storm of indignation swept over the West when Cleveland’s proclamation of creating Forestry Reserves were [sic] published.”290
On June 4, 1897—largely in response to western outrage—Congress clarified the reasoning behind the reserves with the Forest Organic Act (also known as the Pettigrew Amendment). The act stated that the purpose of the reserves was "to improve and protect the forest within the boundaries for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flow, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States." The act also handed the administration of the reserves over to the General Land Office and permitted "bona fide settlers, miners, residents, and prospectors for minerals to remove needed fuel and timber for personal use." In 1899 the Lewis and Clarke Reserve began permitting sheep grazing but rescinded the offer a year later. It would take a new administration with a new direction before the management and use of the forests was very well organized.31

In 1905, at the recommendation of the American Forestry Conference and the hearty endorsement of President Theodore Roosevelt, Congress transferred the reserves to the Division of Forestry, headed by recently appointed chief forester Gifford Pinchot. The new chief was a Yale graduate from a well-to-do family who had spent time in Europe studying forestry. He returned with strong ideas about what constituted proper management of forest resources. His ascendency to Chief of the Forest Service was the result as much of his friendship with Roosevelt (and his membership in the Boone and Crockett Club), as it was his own knowledge of professional forestry and his drive and persistence.32

Pinchot understood the hostilities he was up against, and to upgrade the agency's image, he renamed it the Forest Service, which was to administer not forest reserves, but national forests. In a letter of instruction, Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson (though probably penned by Pinchot himself) wrote what would become the prime directive of the Forest Service: "... where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run."33

Pinchot energized his fledgling agency by hiring capable young men and cultivating an unprecedented esprit de corps, operating with nearly total freedom from political influence. Nevertheless, Pinchot demanded military-like efficiency in his employees. Elers Koch, who surveyed parts of the Lewis and Clarke Forest Reserve, spent the spring of 1906 in administrative work under Pinchot. Though Koch greatly admired Pinchot, he also described him as a "taskmaster" who was intolerant of careless mistakes. "When we wrote a letter for G. P. to sign," he recalled, "we always awaited in fear and trembling. If he signed it without change, it was an occasion of triumph. Often the letter came back with a big blue question mark scrawled across it...."34

Yet largely because of his rigid and demanding style, Pinchot was able to do more for the national forest system than anyone before or since. Among the first items of business was to establish provisions for using the forests. The Forest Service's first Use Book, published in 1905, outlined conditions for regulated grazing, timber cutting, and mining. More importantly, the forests were to be managed for watershed protection and, for the first time, recreation. Pinchot's attempt to balance competing interests institutionalized the concept of multiple-use that still guides the agency today.35

The first supervisor of the Lewis and Clarke Reserve accepted his post in 1898. Remembered more for his skill at poker than his knowledge of forestry, Gust Moscr reputedly kept most of his rangers penniless. But if he was not fully up to the task, then A. B. Bliss, who succeeded Moscr in 1905, certainly wasn't. Elers Koch, who met him, said Bliss was "a nice old man, but quite incompetent, and his only excursions to the forest were drives in a buckboard over the only road on the Reserve to Holland Lake in the head of the Swan."36 Bliss did not last long; the same impression recorded by Koch earned Bliss a transfer. He was replaced a year later.
by F. N. Haines who, along with Page Bunker, supervisor over the south division, would oversee the forest for the next three years.\textsuperscript{37}

The enormous area these men were to administer was still mostly unknown except by Indians and a handful of trappers and woodcutters. Most of it had not been surveyed, and even as late as 1916 there were blank spaces on U.S. Geological Survey maps. But because the reserve had been established and the boundaries drawn, it was now necessary to see what they had reserved. So in 1899, H. B. Ayres was sent by the USGS and devoted the entire summer field season to a reconnaissance survey of the reserve. His primary responsibility was to determine the type and amount of usable resources and to note private inholdings and activities taking place on the reserve.\textsuperscript{38}

Riding one horse and leading another with his supplies, Ayres proceeded systematically across the reserve, exploring one drainage at a time, taking notes and piecing together a rough map of timber resources. He found that a huge portion of the forest had recently burned and a good deal of his time was spent mapping the extent of the burn. He pointed out that east of the divide there was 600 square miles—over one-third of the area—that had been nearly completely burned over in the last 40 years. Because of this, as well as the steep and rocky terrain, he noted there was very little harvestable timber along the Front—he estimated a meager 63 million feet BM. So although the Front comprised 34 percent of the total land area in the reserve, its timber amounted to only two percent of the reserve total.\textsuperscript{39}

Ayres also surveyed how and to what degree people were using the forest. He noted that while there were no mining claims in the area, there were three small sawmills operating in the forest on the South Fork Dupuyer Creek, South Fork Teton Creek, and Smith Creek. He estimated that in addition to 300,000 railroad ties floated down river to Fort Shaw for the Helena branch of the Great Northern Railroad, there had been just over a million feet BM cut along the Front. He also pointed out that although there was little of commercial value, the timber would be able to supply local needs for housing, fencing, and firewood. Two small Métis colonies, one on the South Fork Teton and one on Smith Creek, were supporting themselves mostly by hauling wood to nearby towns. Though Ayres's report was relatively brief and somewhat limited in scope, it was the first official survey of the new Reserve, and the information he left (including a number of good photographs) is among the most important source we have of early forest conditions.\textsuperscript{40}

Throughout the forest reserve's early years there were many changes made to the boundaries, indicating both a shift in management strategies as well as some uncertainty as to the optimum size of a single management unit. The first change, made in 1903, added what is now Glacier National Park to the Lewis and Clarke Reserve. In 1907 more acreage was added bringing the total to a stunning 5,541,180 acres. (That same year also saw a change made to the Reserve name—the "e" was dropped from Clarke. Why it was there in the first place is still unknown.) The massive Forest configuration did not last long, however. The next year, management of the land west of the divide was shifted to the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests, the Glacier area was transferred to the Blackfoot National Forest, and the Lewis and Clark Forest headquarters was moved to Choteau (previously located in Kalispell). Further small reductions were made as certain parts of the Lewis and Clark National Forest were opened to homesteading following the Forest Homestead Act of 1906. A few small reductions were made in 1912 and 1931, ultimately bringing the total down to its present size of 776,259 acres.\textsuperscript{41}

The life of a forest ranger in the early days was often adventurous. The primitive nature of the forests and the remote locations in which rangers were usually stationed were reminiscent
of an earlier era. A number of the early rangers were locals who had homesteaded the area and were familiar with the terrain—people like Henry Waldref, a miner from Lincoln, who worked for the Forest Service seasonally. But most of them were young men like Clyde Fickes who became a Lewis and Clark forest guard in 1907 when he was twenty-three years old. The young ranger had his first real adventure before he even arrived at his post. While riding through the Blackfeet Reservation he was approached by two mounted Blackfeet youths who were twirling ropes. "I had heard of men being roped and dragged to death," he said, "The prospect pleased me not at all, so when they got too close, I pulled out my Luger. That stopped them." Fickes initially was stationed at Hannan Gulch where the Forest Service had retained a cabin previously owned by Jim Hannan (who allegedly used the gulch as a station on the old Oregon-Montana horse-rusting trail until he was persuaded to leave by an angry and armed group of local ranchers). Fickes' nearest neighbor was the reclusive Johnny Mortimer who would often leave his cabin and hide in the rocky cliffs when an unwanted visitor approached. 42

According to the nature of their work, early forest applicants were given two tests, one written (which eliminated illiterates) and one field test. The latter consisted of several parts, as Fickes described in an interview:

"We had to saddle a horse, then ride 100 yards at a walk. Then we had to return, increasing our gait until we were finally moving at a full gallop. Back at the point of departure, we'd take off the riding saddle, then resaddle the horse with a packsaddle and load it with a miscellaneous batch of tools. Then we'd lead the horse, allowing the instructor to see how well the pack would ride." 43

Once hired, the individual was initially appointed a forest guard before progressing through the ranks as an assistant, then a deputy forest ranger, and on up the extensive hierarchy. The work varied tremendously from day to day and included everything from fire fighting to fence mending, from moving cattle to counting elk. It was frequently exciting work, but just as often it was lonely and dull. Ida Woods, who in 1911 married Lewis and Clark forest ranger E. A. Woods, described their life in the small ranger station in Dupuyer canyon:

"We were miles from anyone... We did a lot of reading in the long winter evenings. There were no movies to go to, no radios to listen to, no television sets. Once in a while there would be a neighborhood dance that lasted all night. We seldom went as we were so far away. One had to learn to be self-sufficient in their entertainment as well as other things." 44

There were times, however, that rangers were called to duty in life-threatening circumstances. The great fires of 1910 were such an event. Although nobody lost their lives in the numerous fires on the Lewis and Clark that year, eighty-seven people across the Northern Region did. An estimated 100,000 acres of the Lewis and Clark National Forest burned, much of it along the southern half of the portion of the Divide known as the Chinese Wall. 45 Ida Woods remembered the year well: "The big 1910 fire was then in progress and the smoke began to drift in and ashes dropped all around. The sun looked like a big red ball of fire. We thought that the fire must be coming closer." 46

Though the flames finally died down on August 31 with an early snowfall, other major fires occurred in 1919, 1926, 1929, and 1940. During those years a fire suppression program was born that included the manning of fire lookouts and more modern fire fighting techniques (such as the use of smokejumpers) that reduced the immediate threat of major conflagrations.
But fire suppression also has had the unintended effect of allowing fuel and litter to build up, creating conditions that could lead to catastrophic fires. So far, few wildfires on the Lewis and Clark have been very large with the exception of the 1988 fires that burned nearly 250,000 acres (or 32 percent of the total Forest). Gradually, as fire's role in the ecosystem has come to be better understood, public land agencies have rethought suppression policies. Modern fire plans for the Bob Marshall Wilderness and surrounding forestlands call for allowing wildfires to run their course until they threaten lives or property, and prescribed fires are being used regularly to reduce that threat.47

A National Park for the Front

Fires were not the only major event that occurred on the Rocky Mountain Front in 1910. On May 11 of that year, President William Howard Taft signed the bill that created Glacier National Park, the dramatic, heavily glaciated northern section of the original Lewis and Clarke Reserve. The establishment of the park was the culmination of years of work. Even as early as 1883, fourteen years before it became part of the Forest Reserves, Montana residents had proposed such a park. The idea was later picked up and championed by Boone and Crockett Club member George Bird Grinnell, most notably in a 1901 Century Magazine article entitled, “The Crown of the Continent.” But it was not until 1907, when Montana Senator Thomas Carter submitted the first of several Glacier Park bills to Congress, that the legislative process was set in motion. Though there was some opposition from a few locals who lived and worked in the area, compromises were written into the bill and with much help from the Great Northern Railway's James J. Hill, the bill passed and was signed into law. What was then the Blackfoot National Forest became Glacier National Park. On August 8, William R. Logan arrived as the Park's first administrator and National Park rangers replaced Forest Service rangers.48

Sun River Elk and the Coming of Age of Montana Wildlife Conservation

Montana made great strides in wildlife conservation during the first half of the twentieth century, and the Rocky Mountain Front served as a major proving ground for local, state, and federal initiatives. Managing the popular Sun River elk herd proved to be both difficult as well as educational and helped bring state wildlife conservation to a higher level of awareness. But it would take the passage of some very critical legislation before the larger lessons could even begin.

Though market hunting had been outlawed in 1897, the law was frequently ignored and remained unenforced. So it was a major turning point when W. F. Scott was appointed as the first state Fish and Game Warden in 1901 (the same year the Fish and Game Department was organized). The new warden was assisted by eight deputy game wardens stationed throughout the state—the first departmental field employees. The Legislature also continued to address the statewide decline in wildlife populations, and over the next decade game laws became increasingly restrictive. By 1910 the hunting season had been shortened to the months of October and November, and bag limits had been reduced to three deer, one elk, one sheep, and one goat. In hopes of recovering their populations, the season was closed year-round for antelope, moose, caribou, and bison. In 1913 the Montana Fish and Game Commission was reorganized and though they had very little authority in the beginning, over the years they would gradually gain discretionary power. By 1921 the commission had been given the authority to establish game
preserves, allot fish and game districts, and to close or open seasons under certain circum-
stances—thus removing at least some of the decision making from the whims of political expe-
diency. In the first two decades of the century, Montana wildlife conservation began to make
important strides towards becoming a comprehensive and effective program.49

The year 1913 would prove to be of questionable benefit to Rocky Mountain Front con-
servation. In that year the Sun River Game Preserve was established by the Montana Legisla-
ture—the third of many preserves that the legislature, and later the Game and Fish Commission,
established over the next twenty years. Though the preserve undoubtedly helped the Sun River
elk herd to recover, it also became the focus of one of the most contentious debates ever to
surface between agency and citizen groups on the Front.

Even as early as 1910 many believed the elk herd was on the rebound (likely due to preda-
tor control and the expansion of the grasslands due to fires and logging). Nevertheless, sports-
men issued a petition to the Forest Service urging the removal of livestock from the upper Sun
River. That request was not honored but in 1913 the Montana Legislature went even further
when they passed “an act to establish a Game Preserve in the Rocky Mountains, for the protec-
tion of game animals and birds.” Introduced by a state senator from Choteau, it was a little
discussed bill that prohibited grazing and hunting on 195,877 acres of the upper Sun River
drainage of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. On the twenty-fifth of February Governor
S. V. Stewart signed the bill into law. Ironically, it was a decision that many who came to
champion the elk herd would later regret.50

The Sun River Game Preserve turned out to be so effective in restoring elk populations
that it quickly surpassed its intended goal. In 1913 the elk census revealed 965 animals; just
four years later the count was 1,708 (a 177 percent increase). The herd continued to grow,
soon exceeding what the available forage could support, and hunting pressure outside the pre-
serve was not sufficient to control the population. The situation had gotten out of hand by
1928 when 3,180 elk were counted in the census and agency personnel began to report severe
overgrazing and erosion in the preserve. During hard winters, elk began traveling to private
lands off the preserve for forage. Still, several hundred elk died each winter. Public officials and sportsmen’s groups knew that something had to be done. Sportsmen’s groups again pressured the Forest Service into reducing livestock grazing on ranges adjacent to the preserve by 87 percent between 1912 and 1932. By 1934 cattle had been completely withdrawn from the North Fork of the Sun River.\textsuperscript{91}

The problem, however, was far from solved. Instead it grew increasingly complicated as the issue came to be publicized and opinions concerning what to do grew more divergent. Ranchers were growing increasingly frustrated as the growing elk herd migrated out of the mountains to winter on their land. Census data clearly showed that the herd was larger than what the preserve could support and, to complicate matters, the elk were competing for forage directly with the Sun River bighorn sheep herd. The resulting hunger stress on the sheep led to malnutrition that, coupled with lungworm disease, caused a major die-off of sheep in 1936. Desperate Forest Service and Fish and Game personnel urged either abolishing the preserve or allowing a larger elk harvest, but many sportsmen were outraged by the idea, even accusing the Forest Service of inflating the elk count to justify increasing the hunt. Because the Fish and Game Commission did not yet have the authority to set bag limits, any change would require a legislative act and sportsmen would not let that happen. Meanwhile, the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, had ordered the Forest Service to assume management of wildlife in national forests, and to use the Sun River district as the test. The incensed Fish and Game Commission threatened to take the issue to the Supreme Court if it had to. Though little actually came of the issue, it was the beginning of a political battle that would rage for years.\textsuperscript{92}

In 1938 the problem of elk wintering on private lands came to a head in a brief but dramatic episode. It began when an angry Augusta rancher by the name of C. R. Rathbone placed an advertisement in an eastern newspaper offering to hire a machine-gunner to kill elk that were wintering on his ranch. He received no takers so took it upon himself to remedy the situation. He shot an elk, was prosecuted, and found guilty. He appealed to the Montana Supreme Court which remanded the case for retrial and also set out some guidelines that recognized both the state’s right to protect wildlife as well as the citizen’s right, under certain circumstances, to protect private property. Significantly, the higher court also recommended that each case should be judged according to its particular circumstances. Though anticlimactic, \textit{Rathbone v. Montana} served as an important precedent for later wildlife damage issues.\textsuperscript{93}

The year 1941 became a major turning point in the state wildlife program when Montana passed an enabling act to take advantage of a new federal act that many believe was the most productive and far-reaching wildlife legislation ever enacted. The United States Congress had passed the Pittman–Robertson Federal Aid Act (P-R Act) in 1937. This legislation made a portion of the excise tax on guns and ammunition available for wildlife restoration projects in states that accepted the conditions of the act. For the states’ part, they were required to use hunting license fees only for wildlife restoration projects. License fees, then, would be matched 3:1 with federal moneys. The passage of the enabling act in Montana made funds immediately available to begin wildlife research programs. The first major step was to hire more than a dozen technically trained field men. In that same year, the Fish and Game Commission finally was allowed full control over state wildlife management; for the first time the commission could set both seasons and bag limits in addition to establishing game preserves. With this new power given the department and with science brought to bear on decision making, Montana wildlife conservation had finally come of age.\textsuperscript{94}

The state’s decision to agree to the P-R Act played a critical role in addressing the Sun River elk herd problem. In 1943, the Fish and Game Commission and the Forest Service con-
tacted Great Falls businessman, Tom Messelt (who was also the first secretary of the Montana Wildlife Federation and familiar with the issue) and asked him to organize a committee to seek a solution to the elk problem. Messelt, in turn, contacted local ranchers Charles Willard of Augusta and Carl Malone of Choteau. Including Malone was an especially good choice. Shortly before the P-R Act was accepted by the state, he had made his feelings known before the Montana Wildlife Federation in favor of wildlife. In his speech he described how he and his wife were “interested in preserving game, not only for the sport of hunting but for the pleasure of living with them.” Conservation interests were represented by Al Reigel of the Helena Wildlife Federation and Jess Gleason from the Choteau wildlife group. Along with Forest Service and Fish and Game representatives, these men formed the core of the Sun River Conservation Council. At the first meeting they rode into the Sun River Preserve and saw for themselves the damaged range. As the day wore on the problem became clear: there were too many elk but sportsmen would not allow the preserve to be abolished; increasing the allowable elk harvest had not curbed the population; and the salting program (designed to redistribute the elk) had proven ineffective. The conversation eventually drifted towards the idea of acquiring elk winter range to decrease depredation on private land and to help heal the elk’s summer range. At that point such a move seemed unlikely, but the seed had been planted.55

The idea lay dormant for several years but was revived in 1947 when an elderly rancher named Brucegard, who owned land adjacent to the national forest near the preserve, offered to sell his land to the Montana Fish and Game Department. Brucegard knew his ranch provided excellent winter range and for some time had hoped it could be the elk’s winter home. But there was one major catch: the down payment had to be received that day or the land would be sold to another buyer who already had his check waiting. To make matters worse, it was eleven o’clock on Saturday and the banks would close in another hour. It would be impossible for the department to come up with the money that quickly. In desperation, Fish and Game personnel phoned Tom Messelt and explained the problem. Messelt called Carl Malone and together they raised the $10,000 required for the down payment. Their money held the ranch until the department could purchase it. Because it was the first time anyone had heard of stockmen and sportsmen teaming up in such a way and for such a purpose, the news spread through management circles across the nation. For the first time in 60 years, the Sun River elk had their own winter range on the Front, and the long struggle between ranchers’ interests and the elk’s interest subsided.56

Bruce Neal, who for some time had been the local deputy game warden and had developed a fondness for the Sun River elk, became first manager of the Sun River Game Range—a position he maintained until his retirement in 1956. Within a short time the majority of the elk herd were using the newly purchased range. This not only benefited the elk, but the reduction of forage competition allowed the bighorn sheep herd to recover. The acquisition of the game range was an unqualified blessing but the saga of the Sun River elk herd was far from over. Though the elk now had a winter range, their numbers continued to rise. By 1950, the elk count was one of the highest on record—3,265 elk. While the Fish and Game Department succeeded in maintaining a high harvest rate (an average of 621 animals per year), it was at the expense of a bitter public debate between the agency and the Cascade County Wildlife Association, a group that argued the harvest was too high. Yet the decline in the productivity of the herd, as measured in the calf crop, indicated otherwise. Department recommendations for a higher harvest were continually countered by the very vocal and effective Cascade group, and the resulting compromises kept the harvest lower than the department believed was healthy for the herd.57
Not every issue that arose found sportsmen and Fish and Game personnel at odds. In 1956, for instance, when it was proposed to open state school lands located within the game range for oil and gas leasing, the Cascade County Wildlife Association, the Sun River Conservation Council, and the Montana Fish and Game Department worked together to convince the state land board to exclude the game range from leasing. Again in 1959, the department and sportsmen groups effectively opposed the siting of an intercontinental ballistic missile site on the Sun River Game Range.  

Even though the Sun River Game Range went a long way towards providing a solution to the elk depredation problem, the preserve continued to provide artificial protection of the herd and severely limited the department’s options. The situation worsened in 1964 when the Sun River Canyon road was improved. The road allowed easier access to the North Fork country by hunters and created a firing-line situation along the east side of the Sun River. Many agency personnel and hunters continued to oppose the preserve. In 1969 another bill was introduced to abolish it, but like all the times before, the bill was voted down—largely due to pressure from the Cascade sportsmen’s group. But over the years people like Bruce Neal and Bert Goodman (who succeeded Neal in managing the game range) have continued to push for the preserve’s abolishment out of concern for the elk’s quality of life. (Even the current elk management plan calls for “pursuing the abolishment of the preserve.”) Although other preserves, including the Blackleaf Game and Bird Preserve created by legislature in 1923 and abolished in 1953, have come and gone with little opposition, any proposal dealing with the nationally recognized Sun River elk herd is closely scrutinized. The preserve remains but today elk numbers are being kept at more viable levels. Since the early hard-fought battles, the Fish and Game Commission voted unanimously to maintain the elk herd at 2,200 animals (later increased to 2,500), which at least has kept catastrophe at bay.  

There have been two other very important game ranges on the Front that were acquired by the Fish and Game Department (now called Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks) with money from the P-R Act. Both the Ear Mountain and the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Areas were established along the national forest boundary to provide important wildlife habitat. Ear Mountain is intended primarily for mule deer and bighorn sheep while the Blackleaf was purchased for mule deer, elk, and grizzly bears. With these acquisitions and the Sun River WMA, the Front’s wildlife are afforded a much greater level of security, and they are indefinitely assured, at least in part, of their habitat needs.  

During the first half of the twentieth century, then, Montana wildlife conservation grew to become an effective program, and the Sun River area had become a proving ground for conservation efforts. The acceptance of the P-R Act by Montana ushered in a new era for state wildlife policy and helped bring a satisfying conclusion to the problem of the Sun River elk. State wildlife conservation has continued to develop and improve. Recent years have seen the department shift towards a more holistic, ecosystem-based approach to wildlife management. In 1991 the department released an unprecedented document entitled the Limits of Acceptable Change: Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Fish and Wildlife Plan. This plan approached wildlife management from an ecosystem perspective. In 1994 as sort of crowning achievement, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and local Forest Service supervisors signed a Memorandum of Understanding adopting a cooperative approach towards ecosystem management within the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. In 1995 both agencies drafted and adopted the “Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Framework for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.” From single-species preserves to multi-species ecosystem-based management, Montana wildlife conservation has truly achieved a respectable status.
Robert Marshall was born on January 2, 1901, in New York City to wealthy and politically influential parents who were concerned with the conservation of natural resources. His father had fought successfully to retain the “forever wild” clause in the New York constitution that protected the Adirondacks. By the time Bob was in high school he had developed a passion for wild country and read with longing of the grand adventures of explorers, especially those of Lewis and Clark. After earning a forestry degree, he entered the Forest Service, and 1925 found him employed at the Northern Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station in Missoula—the town he would remember as his “best loved city.” In 1928, Marshall took his first hike through the mountainous area that was later to bear his name. This particular journey took him 288 miles from Swan Range to Holland Lake at an average clip of 36 miles per day. This was not unusual for him, who by age thirty-six could boast of more than 200 day-hikes of 30 miles, 51 day-hikes of 40 miles, and many of up to 70 miles. Bob loved to push himself, always testing his endurance. A retired supervisor of Idaho’s Clearwater National Forest told of a 50-miler he made in the Bitterroots, “My fellas told me that when Marshall came in over the divide, he was so exhausted he would stumble, fall, lay there for a while and then hike some more.”

Though there’s no record indicating Marshall saw the area, it is likely he would have opposed Gibson dam, which inundated part of the Sun River Canyon. The dam, started in 1926, provided 105,000-acre feet of water to irrigate some 80,000 acres of bench lands out on the plains. But it also inundated a beautiful canyon and a major elk migration route. In 1929, the same year the dam was completed, the Forest Service established the “1.-20 Regulations” that provided for primitive areas in the national forests “to conserve . . . the opportunity to the public to observe the conditions which existed in the pioneer phases of the nation’s development.” At least partly in response to the National Park Service’s aggressive land acquisition policy under Steven Mather, the regulations gave the Forest Service additional ammunition in the battle between the two agencies over which one would be America’s favorite playground.

Using the new L-Regulations, the regional Forest Service office in Missoula set in motion the process of designating three primitive areas to be established over a four-year period. Together these areas would later become the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Through the combined efforts of a federally crafted tool, the initiative of local Forest Service employees, and the support of citizens and state officials, the first parcels of land were reserved that would become the
most celebrated wilderness area in America. In 1931 Forest Service Chief R.Y. Stuart signed the papers that designated the first of these—a huge 625,000-acre swath of the South Fork Flathead River and its tributaries. Prominent behind the decision was Assistant Regional Forester for Recreation and Lands, Meyer H. Wolff, who had drawn up the boundaries on a map in his office. Wolff’s lyrical description of the area indicates that his motivations ran deeper than simply as an agent fulfilling a Forest Service directive. In a 1941 issue of The Living Wilderness published by The Wilderness Society, he wrote, “Countless rugged peaks are a home for mountain goats and Big Horn Sheep. Below in cirques and hanging valleys glisten lakes which feed clear, cold rushing streams... grassy parks and high alpine meadows flourish their characteristic flowers, gems in a vast setting of green forest.” Wolff’s plan was given the enthusiastic support of Regional Forester Evan W. Kelley—a hard-edged military veteran who has been remembered most often for his strict forest fire policy and for his stance on managing primitive areas. Their proposal was forwarded to Washington and quickly approved. No roads existed or would be allowed in the new primitive area. No improvements were to be made except as needed for administration, and all travel would be by trail alone. The Helena Independent noted, “with a length in excess of forty-five miles, an average width of twenty miles... this is one of the largest primitive tracts so far established in the national forests of the West.”

In 1933, the same year President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of his New Deal package, the 95,000-acre Pentagon Primitive Area was proposed by Wolff and Kelley and signed into existence by the new Forest Service Chief Ferdinand A. Silcox (1933-39). The next year the same process was followed for the 240,000-acre Sun River Primitive Area joining the South Fork Primitive Area on the west and the Pentagon Primitive Area on the north. The three areas were contiguous and unbroken except for a 31,000-acre strip dividing the Pentagon and Sun River units along the headwaters of the Spotted Bear River. This section had been excluded because it was under consideration for water-power development and fire access roads. At Wolff’s request, however, the strip was added to the Pentagon area in 1939. With the three primitive areas now back to back, the stage was set that ultimately would carry the entire area to full statutory protection.

The first test of the sanctity of primitive areas appropriately found its way to Bob Marshall, who in May 1937 had been appointed Director of Recreation and Lands—a new position created by Chief Silcox and practically tailor-made for Marshall. Two months into his new position, Regional Forester Kelley sent a letter requesting permission to fly hunters into the South Fork Primitive Area to reduce the seriously overpopulated elk herd. After brief consultation with a Montana friend, Marshall denied the request. In a letter to Kelley, he explained that, “[t]he precedent of opening a primitive area to commercial airplane entry will be very serious, not only for this area but for the whole United States. Once you make an exception, there is no limit to the other exceptions which will be demanded... on the basis of this one.”

One of Bob Marshall’s great achievements in his lifetime was to develop a more comprehensive program for protecting wild areas. His U-Regulations replaced the L-Regulations on September 19, 1939. The new regulations for the first time distinguished wilderness areas by size, relative wilderness, and degree and type of permitted human activity. Wilderness areas 100,000 acres or larger were classified as U-1, between 50,000 and 100,000 classified as U-2, and lesser roadless areas as U-3. Another change was that the Secretary of Agriculture rather than the Chief of the Forest Service must make the designation. As a classification system, it was more sweeping and sophisticated than the L-Regulations it superseded. Undoubtedly, given Marshall’s
passion for wilderness, he would have continued to influence wilderness designations and made many other contributions. But as it was, his career came to an early end—abruptly and without warning.10

Marshall had been aware that his heart was weak but would not heed advice to abandon his strenuous lifestyle. Two months after a grueling hike through Washington's Northern Cascades, he died quietly on November 11, 1939, on a train en route from Washington, D.C. to New York City. Some say he simply hiked his heart to death. But even in his short thirty-eight years he left behind an important legacy. In addition to being responsible for adding 5,437,000 acres to the Forest Service wilderness system, Marshall helped to fasten value to wilderness against the forces opposed to conservation. And it was Marshall who challenged what had become the Forest Service's motto. "The doctrine of the greatest good to the greatest number," he pointed out, "does not mean that this laudable relationship has to take place on every acre. If it did, we would be forced to change our metropolitan art galleries into metropolitan bowling alleys... [and] the Library of Congress would become a national hot dog stand..."11

Because of his influence on the Forest Service and the respect he had earned, on August 16, 1940, Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace—upon the recommendation of the regional forest office—reclassified the South Fork, Pentagon, and Sun River Primitive Areas under Regulation U-1 and named the combined 950,000 acres the Bob Marshall Wilderness. It was the most significant reclassification of Forest Service lands prior to World War II—and an honor originally intended for the Selway-Bitterroots. But Forester Kelley argued in a letter to headquarters that the three primitive areas straddling the Continental Divide would be a better memorial: the land Bob had not allowed to be compromised appropriately came to bear his name.12

The Battle of Bunker Creek

The first major challenge to face the Bob Marshall Wilderness did not surface until the early 1950s when the Forest Service announced plans to sell some twenty-three million board feet of spruce-bark beetle infested trees in the upper Bunker Creek drainage that lay just outside the northwest corner of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The plan, which called for 30 miles of new roads, alarmed many locals. It started with an article written by a local outfitter and published in the Kalispell Daily Interlake, followed shortly with a petition presented by the Flathead Wildlife Association to the Secretary of Agriculture. The petition not only opposed the logging plans, but also asked that an additional 279,000 acres of roadless area, including the Bunker Creek drainage, be added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The planned sale prompted outfitter and guide Tom Edwards to draft a letter to the regional office requesting an extension of the wilderness boundary southward to include the Scapegoat area. Many locals as well as the Department of Fish and Game rallied behind the plans to expand the wilderness. The Montana Legislature even passed a bill proposing that the expansion serve as a memorial to Congress, though it was vetoed by Governor J. Hugo Aronson. Although the Bunker Creek controversy ended with the Forest Service going ahead with the sale, the issue served to galvanize support for future wilderness additions and set an important precedent of citizen-based action.13
The Dam that Wouldn’t Go Away

In 1953 the Bureau of Reclamation revived a plan calling for the construction of a dam that would inundate the grassy parklands of the North Fork of the Sun River valley. Ostensibly for flood control, the Sun Butte Dam was first proposed in 1908 and resurfaced after nearly every flood since then. The plan had been opposed by nearly everyone except the Bureau of Reclamation. Sportsman, the governor, the Fish and Game Department, and Senior U.S. Senator Lee Metcalf all spoke out against the proposal. In 1952 Secretary of Interior Oscar Chapman ordered the investigative work to stop, arguing that the plan should be scrapped because the Bob Marshall Wilderness “ranks among the half dozen finest unspoiled mountain wilderness tracts in the nation.” So when the Bureau of Reclamation Regional Director Kenneth F. Vernon introduced the idea again after the 1953 flood, the Wilderness Society, after their annual June meeting in Augusta, took a five-day trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness to investigate. Upon returning, Howard Zahniser, the Society’s Executive Secretary, wrote to Interior Secretary Douglas McKay and argued, “Clearly, the waters of the North Fork did not contribute significantly to this Sun River flood, and efforts of the Bureau of Reclamation’s regional director to mislead the public into believing that a North Fork impoundment would have prevented the flood’s damage seems to me to be reprehensible.”

Despite widespread opposition, the plan lingered. In 1957 a party including livestock interests, the Forest Service, the Fish and Game Department, and representatives of the Montana Wildlife Federation, the Wilderness Society, and the Sun River Conservation Council toured the area and reaffirmed their opposition. Thomas H. Deckert of the Montana Wildlife Federation spoke for the group: “The consensus is that the area should be kept in its present state of primitiveness.” Bob Cooney, coordinator for the Wildlife Restoration Division of the Fish and Game Department, concurred: “From a wildlife point of view alone, the wilderness habitat now afforded presents an environment highly valuable in the perpetuation and survival of several rare species. Wilderness type hunting and fishing is becoming increasingly difficult to find and is therefore considered of immeasurable value.”

The dam proposal was shelved until the devastating 1964 flood in which many people lost their lives. This time the plan called for an even larger dam to be built further down the canyon from Gibson and to hold more water. The now unified and practiced opposition to the Sun River canyon dams campaigned once more against the project, writing letters to congressional delegates and agency officials. Their work ultimately paid off. The Bureau of Reclamation finally decided to build the flood control dam lower down the Sun River at Lowry near the town of Simms. With passage of the Wilderness Act that same year, the threat of damming of the Sun River Canyon subsided forever. The canyon dam was never built.
The Passage of the Wilderness Act

The Bob Marshall Wilderness was not only a place where conservationists fought their battles, it also helped to spawn conservationists and influenced in various ways the passage of the Wilderness Act. In 1958, Ken Baldwin—who worked as a packer for $50 a week at the Allan ranch in the North Fork Sun River Canyon—along with his wife Florence, helped start the Montana Wilderness Association, the first state wildlands conservation group in the nation. Several of its charter members would be instrumental in passage of the Wilderness Act, including Howard Zahniser (who wrote most of it), well known figures such as wildlife biologists Olaus Murie and John Craighead, and seasoned locals Bob Cooney and Tom Edwards.\textsuperscript{17}

Zahniser and Murie were better known for their involvement with the Wilderness Society which had been co-founded in 1935 by game management patriarch Aldo Leopold and fellow wildlands champion Bob Marshall, among others. Under Zahniser’s leadership, the Wilderness Society began a drive to establish a congressionally legislated wilderness system. Numerous bills were introduced but were consistently blocked by the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs under chairman Wayne Aspinall of Colorado. But by 1963, Aspinall had softened his stance and when the bill came up again, his committee approved it.\textsuperscript{18}

On the eve of the passage of the Wilderness Act, Zahniser, who had steered each new bill through endless hearings in ten different states, was suffering from health problems. Yet despite council from friends, he would not stop fighting for its passage. On August 5, 1963, he took his last trip through the Bob Marshall Wilderness, carrying in his pack a supply of emergency oxygen. The trip came in part at the urging of his doctor, and at the end of 12 days Zahniser announced that he felt more fit than ever. A year later found him testifying for the last time in favor of the bill, confident that this time it would pass.\textsuperscript{19} The final bill had been rewritten 66 times but the words retained were mostly Zahniser’s, who had carefully crafted each sentence. His definition of wilderness has remained the most often quoted words of the Act: “A Wilderness,” he wrote, “in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”\textsuperscript{20} Zahniser’s unflagging diligence finally paid off when Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law on September 3, 1964. Zahniser, however, did not have the pleasure of witnessing its enactment. A week after his last congressional testimony he died in his sleep.\textsuperscript{21}

With passage of the Wilderness Act, all 9.1 million acres of the Forest Service’s U-1 designated lands automatically became congressionally recognized wilderness, statutorily protected. Among the areas was the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Because it would now take an act of Congress to abolish it, there was a great deal more security in a wilderness designation. Under the conditions of the 1964 act, the Forest Service was required to develop a management plan for the Bob Marshall that incorporated more stringent restrictions. For the first time the agency placed a limit on the number of outfitter camps, and groups were now limited to a maximum of 14 days per campsite. All permanent structures were to be removed, fire lookouts were to be phased out, and studies were to be conducted on fire’s role in the ecosystem.\textsuperscript{22}

Several new guidelines had been at the recommendation of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Committee, which had been created in 1958 to inventory the nation’s recreational resources and propose a future course of policy. Between 1959 and 1962 the Committee produced a vast body of information and recommendations, including guidelines for management. More significant, perhaps, was that the committee had grown increasingly convinced of the great social value of wilderness.\textsuperscript{23} One of the comments they received during their
research was a letter from Pulitzer Prize winning author Wallace Stegner (who, incidentally, had lived for a time as a child in Great Falls). In what he called simply "an afternoon's labor," Stegner spoke to the need for wild country in a statement that has resonated in the minds of conservationists ever since:

Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the last virgin forests to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases; if we drive the few remaining members of the wild species into zoos or to extinction; if we pollute the last clean air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence, so that never again will Americans be free in their own country from the noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste. And so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it...

We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.²⁴

The Citizen's Wilderness

In 1963 the Forest Service published its long-range plans for the north half of the Lincoln ranger district, most of which was roadless. Rather than recommending any of it for protection, the plan simply opened it for multiple-use in what appeared to be blind compliance with the recently enacted Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act. Passed in 1960, this act amended the 1897 Organic Act and directed the Forest Service to manage equally for recreation, range, timber, watershed, and habitat (although without explicit instructions on how this was to be done). At about the same time the Forest Service was beginning to encounter intense criticism for the extent and type of timber harvesting it was allowing on public lands. Since World War II, the demand for wood products had skyrocketed and the Forest Service seemed to be catering to the timber industry, allowing the national forests to become little more than tree farms. Between 1961 and 1963, the Montana timber harvest exploded, rising from about 480 million board feet to 730 million board feet per year, and would remain high until the early 1970s. Just as alarming as the amount of wood being taken was the method favored for taking it. Clearcutting was cheap and quick and encouraged even-aged stands—all of which was highly advantageous to timber companies. But such practices also led to the loss of topsoil, which severely reduced the land's fertility, and tore apart and simplified complex ecosystems. Fisheries were damaged as streams carried a higher amount of sediment and rose in temperature. Despite its destructiveness, by 1969 61 percent of the western timber harvest was obtained through clearcutting, laying waste to habitat and sending harmful ripple effects through ecosystems.²⁵

In the midst of this apparent shift away from the Pinchot-style sustainable forestry, the Lincoln Forest Plan was the cause of great concern to locals. The area had already experienced dramatic changes in their economy after highway 200 was completed in 1957 linking Missoula to Great Falls and opening this previously remote region to logging trucks and the automotive tourist. What had been an outfitting-based economy changed towards one based on service and resource extraction. The forest plan threatened even greater change, calling for a network of roads to be built through the mountains to facilitate timber harvest and provide recreational
access to motorists. On April 19, 1963, Helena National Forest Supervisor Vern Hamre outlined the plan to a group of some 300 people at a meeting at the Lincoln community hall. The meeting and the plan Hamre described had the unintended effect of solidifying opposition. Cecil Garland of the Lincoln Backcountry Protective Association and the Montana Wilderness Association teamed up to counter the plan. Likely due to such vocal opposition, Robert Morgan replaced Hamre in late 1963, and in response to public outrage over the proposal, Morgan delayed the plans indefinitely.26

In the same way the Bunker Creek controversy produced wilderness proposals, Cecil Garland and a host of others decided to take the Lincoln issue one step further and push for wilderness protection of the area. They appealed to Senators Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf, who together introduced legislation in 1965 to protect 75,000 acres of the Lincoln backcountry. In a move uncharacteristic for a Republican, Congressman Jim Batin developed his own proposal that added the Scapegoat area to form a much larger 240,000-acre wilderness. Mansfield and Metcalf quickly adopted Batin’s bill. The proposal faced strong opposition, especially by Forest Service Regional Supervisor Neal Rahm, and because it was the first citizen-based wilderness legislation following the passage of the Wilderness Act, its precedent-setting potential alarmed some congressmen.27

Meanwhile, the bill’s proponents pressed on. At a congressional hearing on September 23, 1968, Cecil Garland explained his reasons for supporting the wilderness proposal by describing his first trip into the Lincoln backcountry:

We shattered the calm of that September evening with a blast from our elk call. Then almost as if by magic, above us on Red Mountain a bull elk bugled his challenge that this was his home. All through the frosty fall air the calls echoed back and forth and I knew that I had found wilderness. I would not sleep that night for I was trying to convince myself that this was really so; that there was wild country like this left and that somehow I had found it. But all was not at peace in my heart for I knew that someday, for some unknown reason, man would try to destroy this country, as man had altered and destroyed before. That night I made a vow, that whatever the cost for whatever the reason, I would do all that I could do to keep this country as wild as I had found it.28

Tom Edwards, an outfitter from Ovando and another leader of the citizens’ movement for wilderness, spoke at the same hearing. Having outfitted in the Lincoln-Scapegoat for more than a quarter of a century, the area had grown close to his heart. “I love the high country and alpine meadows with a passion,” he said. “It restores my soul and into this land of spiritual strength I have been privileged to guide over the years literally thousands of people. . . .”29

With help from the Montana congressmen, the Scapegoat bill passed the Senate a year later but languished in the house for three years. Once again, Wayne Aspinall of the Interior Committee delayed the bill by requiring a mineral survey of the area. When the Geological Survey found no significant mineral deposits, the future of the bill rested with Senator Mansfield’s efforts to sway Aspinall’s vote, and his work paid off. Within a year, Aspinall relented and in 1972 the Scapegoat Wilderness became the first de facto wilderness to join the National Wilderness Preservation System. Through the labor of local citizens and sympathetic congressional delegates, the great southern part of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem was to be forever protected.30

Meanwhile some important legislation on national forests had been signed into law. The first was the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) which both established the
Council on Environmental Quality and, more importantly, required the evaluation of potential environmental impacts on any project undertaken on federal lands. This act was the origin of the well-known Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which would prove critical to public participation in decisions made by the Forest Service and other public land agencies. Bringing in the public on decision-making has created a whole slew of court cases as environmentalists have brought lawsuits against agencies, most frequently for not complying with NEPA mandates. This has had the unintended effect of often forcing the courts to supervise agency decisions. Ultimately NEPA and the EIS have been tools that empower citizens and force more critical assessments of projects’ environmental consequences. With the possible exception of the Endangered Species Act, no act has had more impact on Forest Service policy.\textsuperscript{31}

A second act passed by Congress seven years later, and dealing specifically with national forest lands, was born out of a major controversy in Montana. In response to the continuing complaints over Forest Service logging practices, in 1969 Senator Lee Metcalf asked Arnold Bolle, Dean of the School of Forestry at the University of Montana, to form a committee to investigate the Forest Service’s timber policy in the Bitterroot National Forest. The committees’ report, “A University View of the Forest Service,” drew national attention. The Bolle Report, as it came to be known, charged the Forest Service with poor management and concluded, “Multiple use management, in fact, does not exist as the governing principle on the Bitterroot National Forest; quality timber management and harvest practices are missing. Consideration of recreation, watershed, wildlife, and grazing appear as afterthoughts . . . ” The report, while bringing disgrace upon the Forest Service, led to some important policy changes. Most notable were the guidelines on clearcutting by Senator Frank Church of Idaho that laid the foundation for the 1976 National Forest Management Act.\textsuperscript{32}

Although it did not ban clearcutting outright, the 1976 act limited it significantly. Among the act’s mandates was one stating that the sale of timber from each forest must be limited to a quantity no more than what the forest could replace on a sustained-yield basis. At the same time, it directed the Forest Service to maintain species diversity in addition to the other multiple-use requirements. Of great importance to citizen participation and agency accountability was the requirement that called for comprehensive forest plans. All usages of the forest were to be laid out in detailed fifty-year plans and, like the NEPA Environmental Impact Statement, would be subject to public review.\textsuperscript{33}

Meanwhile in 1972 Chief Forester Edward Clif announced that his agency was undertaking a study of roadless areas in the national forests. Known as the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (or RARE I), the results were disappointing. Out of some 56 million acres, only 12.3 (or 19 percent) were “given priority for further intensive studies.” The selection process guaranteed nothing, and the review only selected a fraction of the total roadless areas, a situation which lead-the Sierra Club to file suit. The Forest Service then agreed to issue an Environmental Impact Statement in compliance with NEPA. RARE II, issued in 1979, was more comprehensive—identifying nearly three thousand different roadless areas totaling 62 million acres. But again the wilderness recommendations were unimpressive—only 15 million acres. On the Rocky Mountain Division of the Lewis and Clark National Forest (which had merged with the former Jefferson National Forest in 1932 to include many of the island mountain ranges in eastern Montana), four areas were identified for a total of 353,041 acres. Out of that, 57,649 acres (or about 16 percent) were selected for wilderness recommendation. Once again, disappointment in the minimal amount of land targeted for wilderness led to a lawsuit—this time from the state of California. In California v. Block, the judge found the inventory heavily skewed towards development and deficient in light of NEPA mandates. His findings essentially rendered RARE II invalid.\textsuperscript{34}
The whole issue convinced many conservationists that the Forest Service was no longer going to take a position of leadership when it came to wilderness. The lawsuits indicated that the wilderness issue was not going to be solved on a federal level. It became evident that wilderness designation would have to come on a state by state basis. Since that time many states have passed wilderness bills, although Montana has not. Despite the fact that Montana congressmen have introduced ten separate wilderness bills between 1984 and 1993, the state still lacks legislation that will decide the fate of its roadless areas.35

The Great Bear

In the mid-1950s noted biologist John Craighead and a friend were floating a stretch of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River which drains a huge mass of country on the west side of the Divide (including much of Glacier National Park and part of the Bob Marshall Wilderness). It was on this trip that Craighead told his friend, Clif Merritt, of his idea for a wild rivers system to protect the remaining free-flowing rivers of the United States. In 1957, Craighead detailed his plan in an article in Montana Wildlife. The article caught the eye of Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, who brought it to the attention of President Lyndon Johnson. A bill was drawn up and, with very little opposition, became law in 1968. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act allowed that one of three classes—wild, scenic, or recreational—could be designated to rivers with outstanding scenic, recreational, geological, wildlife, historical or cultural values. In 1976, portions of the South, Middle, and North Forks of the Flathead River were added to this new system. Though only affording protection to the river itself, the designation fueled plans to protect surrounding roadless areas.36

The combination of the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wildernesses protected the great majority of roadless lands in the Northern Continental Divide country. But they also served to highlight the exception of a large corridor between the established wilderness and Glacier National Park. Now with so much of the Flathead River protected from water developments, the surrounding lands seemed to be a wilderness waiting to happen. The idea to protect that area was not new. It had been proposed as early as 1954 when the Flathead Wildlife Association presented its petition against the plan to log Bunker Creek. This time there was a more seasoned group of local wilderness advocates.
that banded together to push the issue. The first meeting of Citizens for the Great Bear was held in 1977 at Tixie’s Bar in Ovando. Already behind the idea was senior Senator Lee Metcalf, whose support had been enlisted sometime earlier when journalist Dale Burkh asked him if he would carry the wilderness proposal. The Senator replied simply, “I’ll do it.”37

Lee Metcalf, who was born in Stevensville, Montana, in 1911, is believed by some to have been one of the most progressive and conservation-minded senators ever. He had introduced legislation as early as 1956 to exempt wildlife refuges from mineral leasing and had been a strong supporter of the Wilderness Act. The total number of environmental bills he sponsored and co-sponsored is staggering. But of all his contributions, many consider the Great Bear Wilderness the centerpiece of his conservation legacy.38

Metcalf had first introduced legislation for a Great Bear Wilderness Study Area in 1975. The boundaries he suggested at that time included the 130,000-acre Badger-Two Medicine—the lower half of the ceded strip that had been purchased from the Blackfeet in 1895. But because of special-use rights they had retained through the purchase agreement, the tribe asked Metcalf to leave the area out of his proposal and he honored their request. But retained in the modified proposal was the addition of 60,000 acres of the Teton-Birch Creek area on the Rocky Mountain Front to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. (Although this was only after a concession was made to Republican Congressman Ron Marlenee that 6,000 acres in the West Fork Teton be reserved for snowmobilers.) Metcalf died before he got to see his legislation approved. But in October 1978, through the efforts of Metcalf and the citizen-led campaign, the 285,000-acre Great Bear became designated wilderness. President Carter, upon signing the bill, paid special tribute to Metcalf: “Establishment of the Great Bear Wilderness is the product of years of work by a tireless and dedicated conservationist, the late Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana . . . I am proud to honor Sen. Metcalf’s memory in signing this important bill.” Now the vast majority of roadless lands in the Northern Continental Divide country were protected, and the wilderness complex as we know it today was complete.39

Threatened and Endangered Species

In 1973, Congress passed one of the strongest and most controversial pieces of environmental legislation ever enacted. The Endangered Species Act afforded federal protection of species that appeared to be headed towards extinction. Listed species were to be classified as either “threatened” or “endangered,” and a plan was to be drawn up to provide for their recovery. Although it has provided conservationists with a powerful tool to protect critical habitat from development, it has also been the subject of great dispute.40

There are four species on the Rocky Mountain Front currently listed under the Endangered Species Act: the peregrine falcon, the grizzly bear, the lynx, and the gray wolf. (The bald eagle was the fourth until it was delisted in 1999.) Of the three, only the peregrine falcon has escaped resentment. Believed to be just a seasonal resident and inconspicuous, peregrines are given little notice. The grizzly and wolf, however, are a completely different matter.41

Grizzlies have maintained a steady presence on the Front. Research on the bears began here in 1977 and continues to the present. Fish, Wildlife, and Parks estimates a minimum population of 350 bears for the entire Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, with an average density of about one bear per twenty square miles. Many residents thrill to the fact that the bears are present, but others (including a number of ranchers) deeply resent both the bears and the legislation that protects them. Although bear depredations of livestock are not extremely common, they do occur—mostly with sheep. But under the conditions of the Endangered Species Act, there is little ranchers are allowed to do except report the incident to the local state
or federal wildlife agent. Problem bears are sometimes relocated and in some cases killed. Because the grizzly bear is considered by some standards to have reached full recovery in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, many believe the bear should be regionally delisted. The reasoning is that delisting the bear would allow for a wider variety of management options and help reduce conflict with landowners. Regardless of what the outcome will be, most believe that grizzlies are here to stay.42

The situation with the wolf on the Front is entirely different. Although the area is recognized as prime wolf habitat, there is little to indicate wolves will rise to viable population levels in the near future. This is not because wolves cannot thrive here, but because the wolf has proven incompatible with the livestock industry. Though wolves were regionally extirpated in the 1930s, by the late 1980s and early 1990s wolves began to recolonize naturally, expanding south out of Canada. Between 1989 and 1992, a number of sightings were made of a lone male, a pack that ran along Dupuyer Creek, and several transient wolves. By February 1993, a breeding pair was discovered further south. That spring the pair had a litter of four pups and, together they became known as the Sawtooth Pack that ranged over 500 square miles of mountains and plains between Elk Creek and Sun River. In 1996 the pack produced two litters for a total of 14 pups. It may have been the dramatic growth of the pack that led them to killing cattle. The depredations were reported and in response, Federal Wildlife Services killed four of the adults and trapped and relocated ten pups to Yellowstone National Park. Yet depredations continued, which ultimately led to the extermination of the entire pack. Wolf sightings continue to be made on the Front and packs will likely reform, but there is little reason to believe that the age-old conflict between wolves and ranchers will end. Unless a way is found to either reduce livestock depredations or address the issue to the satisfaction of both parties, it is doubtful that wolf populations will be allowed to rise to self-sustaining levels on the Rocky Mountain Front in the near future.43
Private Lands Conservation

While conflicts with ranching have not allowed the wolf to recover along the Rocky Mountain Front, most other species have been able to adjust fairly well to this relatively low-impact industry. Because ranching (unlike farming) is predicated around grass rather than plowed soil, it does not usually degrade wildlife habitat. When it does the land will often recover fairly quickly. Since large ungulate grazing has always been a part of the ecology here, vegetation has evolved with that type of selective pressure. Cattle have been able to fit into the natural scheme of things and, in the absence of bison, serve an important role as grazers. Equally important, ranching has kept the land open, largely free from developments. So habitat conservation has been to some extent a natural by-product of the livelihood here. That is not a claim most places across the country can make.

But the Rocky Mountain Front also has seen a private lands preservation effort of another sort, one much more intentional. In 1978 The Nature Conservancy, a non-profit group that protects land through a combination of easements, lease, and purchase, began to assemble the Pine Butte Swamp Preserve just south of Teton River to protect critical grizzly bear habitat. The Conservancy’s objectives are “to identify, protect, and manage ecologically significant land and endangered plants and animals the land supports.” Considered to be the Montana Nature Conservancy’s “flagship” preserve, and one of the largest in the United States, the Pine Butte Swamp Preserve protects some 18,000 acres through a combination of fee-title, state land leases, and conservation easements. Located twenty-five miles west of Choteau, it is a swath of land encompassing a variety of habitats including mountains, foothills, plains, and wetlands. Origin­ally purchased because of the wetland’s importance as grizzly habitat, the Conservancy has come to realize that it is the unique wetland ecosystem—called a fen—that may be the preserve’s greatest asset. Together the Dutt and McDonald fens make up the largest wetland community of its type south of Canada.

In 1986 the Boone and Crockett Club purchased the 6,000-acre Triple Divide Ranch along the Front west of Dupuyer. Because the Club has been dedicated to wildlife conservation since its inception in 1887, it only seemed natural to commemorate both their founder as well as the Club’s hundred-year anniversary by making such a purchase. The Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch is dedicated to discovering ways in which ranching and other land uses can better coexist with needs of wildlife. The ranch serves three primary functions: as a demonstration project, an education center, and a research study-area. In Roosevelt’s 1907 Message to Congress, he challenged the nation to “increase the usefulness” of the land because it was the key to the prosperity of future generations. Therein lies the great opportunity of the objectives of management, research, and education conducted at the ranch:

- **Wildlife habitat must be maintained and improved on both private and public lands.**
  Without suitable habitat, many wildlife species may decrease in number or disappear.
- **Hard, practical, realistic research must be done to develop techniques and methods for reducing competition between the demands of wildlife and those of agriculture and other land uses.**
- **Information must be disseminated to inform the public about new methods and techniques of land use management in order to influence wise management of our vital land and wildlife resources.**

In cooperation with the University of Montana, the ranch also serves as a focal point for the Boone and Crockett Wildlife Conservation Program—a multidisciplinary research project that includes geology, biology, hydrology, botany, economics, archaeology, and history among
others. In 1993 the conservation education program was initiated to provide science-based field experiences for educators and students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This program offers young people perspectives that will help increase their awareness and understanding of wildlife, agriculture, and the ecosystem while emphasizing land uses that are compatible with the needs of wildlife.  

**Wildlife Conservation on The Blackfeet Indian Reservation**

For most of this century the Blackfeet Reservation, covering the northern third of the Rocky Mountain Front, had no comprehensive wildlife policy. Because the tribe is formally recognized as independent from the state, neither state law or state agencies have had jurisdiction on tribal lands. As a consequence, the story of wildlife conservation on the reservation has been entirely different. Only in the last fifteen years has the tribe formed regulations for managing wildlife. But in that brief span of time they have made considerable progress, and today they are making important contributions to wildlife recovery.

Although the Blackfeet tribe has had its own Fish and Wildlife Department for some thirty years, it developed slowly and handled little more than wildlife-related complaints. As a result, game animals on the reservation had practically ceased to exist. Poverty and high unemployment that forced many tribal members to hunt for food only complicated the situation. Yet even before the tribe began to pursue a formal conservation program, there were signs of a genuine desire to work towards wildlife recovery. In 1979 the Blackfeet adopted 39 head of bison from the Custer National Wildlife Refuge in Wyoming—the first bison to roam on the Front since the end of the robe trade in the 1880s. It was not long before conservation began to gain a foothold on the reservation. Despite a considerable amount of opposition within the tribe, in 1984 the tribe's Fish and Wildlife Department began to institute hunting regulations for the first time, beginning with a fall season on game animals. Three years later a Fish and Wildlife Code was drawn up and adopted by the council. The effects of curbing the year-round hunting were almost immediate. Elk counts numbering around forty animals before the limited season began to rise dramatically. Today elk counts range upward to 2000 animals.

The tribe in the mid-1990s took a second major step when Ira New Breast was hired as the Fish and Wildlife Department's first director. Under his leadership the department began to take a much more proactive approach towards the protection of wildlife. In 1998 the Cochran Ecological Institute out of Canada contacted the department to gauge their interest in reintroducing the swift fox to the reservation. This miniature fox had been extirpated from its original range early in this century primarily due to poisoning and trapping. (Coincidentally, the last one reported in Montana was seen on the reservation in 1918.) The department agreed to take on the project and the first reintroduction took place in August of 1998. Although it is too early to tell for sure, by all appearances the reintroduction was a success—the tiny fox is back to stay. As a sort of crowning achievement upon a brief but effective wildlife program, these reintroductions serve as confirmation that the Blackfeet tribe is dedicated to wildlife conservation.
Roadless Lands and the Natural Gas Controversy

With the addition of the Great Bear and the 60,000-acre Teton-Birch area to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (as the three contiguous wilderness areas are collectively known), the span of federally protected lands had grown to an incredible 1,535,063 acres. Outside of Alaska, only the two-plus million acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho rivals it in size.⁴⁸ Although no additions have been made to the Bob Marshall Complex since 1978, lands along the Rocky Mountain Front have continued to gain recognition for their outstanding wilderness values. In 1980 the Bureau of Land Management designated some of its holdings as wilderness study areas. The designation was made in compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 that placed the bureau on equal footing with the Forest Service and the National Park Service, requiring the agency to inventory its roadless lands. As a result, 6,962 acres adjacent to national forest lands were chosen as wilderness study areas—or about 36 percent of BLM administered lands along the Front. Similar to the RARE recommendations, the designation affords no guaranteed protection in the long term but it does require the lands to be maintained in their present condition (free of development) until a final decision is made.⁴⁹

While there was much for conservationists to celebrate with the additions to the Bob Marshall Complex and the BLM designations, serious threats loomed on the horizon. Foremost was one of the provisions of the Wilderness Act that allowed mining exploration and
claims in wilderness areas to continue through the end of 1983. The Bob Marshall country had escaped mining interests until Consolidated Georix Geophysics applied for an oil and gas seismic exploration permit in 1979. Though the Regional Forester denied the permit, the company along with the Rocky Mountain Oil and Gas Association and the Mountain States Legal Foundation appealed the decision. In response, the newly formed Bob Marshall Alliance along with the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society intervened on the side of the Forest Service. Letters were fired off to Montana’s congressional delegation, and local outfitter Chuck Blixrud traveled to Washington D.C. to speak against the bill. The overwhelming opposition to the “bombing of the Bob,” as the issue came to be known, ultimately led Congressman Pat Williams to get the House Interior Committee to pass an emergency mineral withdrawal for the entire Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.30

This was not the first time, however, that oil and gas had been an issue on the Rocky Mountain Front and was certainly not the last. Montana’s first oil boom took place near Kintla Lake (in present Glacier National Park) in 1892. Several wells were drilled but by 1906 water seepage had shut down most of them. Drilling again took place in the 1930s and 1940s with no success, but in the late 1950s wells were drilled in Blackleaf Canyon and Muddy Creek. Both produced natural gas. Subsequently, a considerable amount of exploration and some drilling took place along the Front but a variety of complications put a stop to development until the Arab oil crisis of the 1970s made the federal government eager to find more domestic sources of oil. Recent natural gas discoveries in other regions along the “Overthrust Belt” that runs from Canada southward along the eastern flank of the Rocky Mountains soon turned industry’s head back towards the Front.31

In 1977, the Lewis and Clark Forest issued their draft management plan recommending to lease much of the roadless forestlands for oil and gas exploration. The plan alarmed many locals, who by this time were a strong base of support. Gene Senti, who had lived and worked as an outfitter and guide in the area since 1970, organized Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front. Their first meeting in the spring of 1978 drew hundreds of people. Overshadowed by the opposition to the leasing proposal, the Forest Service agreed to rework the plan.32

In 1981 the Forest Service issued their Environmental Assessment on oil and gas leasing in non-wilderness (but roadless) areas along the Rocky Mountain Front. Once again, the favored alternative was to lease most of the Front. People again started to mobilize. The Bob Marshall Alliance filed suit in federal district court over the Forest Service’s plan to lease the 42,000-acre Deep Creek area. In the subsequent 1986 case, Bob Marshall Alliance v. Watt, Judge Hatfield ruled that the leases would violate mandates of the National Environmental Protection Act and Endangered Species Act—basically rendering the leases invalid. Meanwhile in late 1983, American Petrofina had filed for a permit to drill in the Hall Creek area of the Badger-Two Medicine—the lower half of the 1895 “ceded strip.” Two years later, the Forest Service and the BLM (which oversees mineral leasing on federal lands) issued a Record of Decision to permit the drilling. The recently formed Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, which ruled in favor of the Alliance and remanded the decision back to the BLM. In 1987 the Forest Service and the BLM again issued a decision to allow drilling and again the decision was appealed, this time forcing the Forest Service to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement. The final draft was issued in 1990 and a year later the agencies issued yet another decision to permit drilling. This time an unprecedented 50 appeals were filed with the Forest Service against the decision. At first the Forest Service and the BLM simply denied the appeals. But when the issue was taken back to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, the bureau reversed its decision.33
Things quieted down as the oil and gas issue remained stalled for two years. Then shortly before President Bush was to leave office, BLM issued a new Record of Decision to allow drilling at Hall Creek. But as a result of strong opposition, the new Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbit, issued a moratorium on oil and gas development in the Badger-Two Medicine to last until 1996. The clock stopped. As the rest of the leases along the Front ran out, the Forest Service began the EIS process for oil and gas leasing all over again. It would be the most comprehensive and detailed document the Lewis and Clark National Forest had ever produced.\textsuperscript{54}

As the EIS was being put together, Gloria Flora replaced Dale Gorman as Lewis and Clark Forest Supervisor, infusing the Great Falls office with new perspectives. She knew she had stepped into a hotbed of conflict between some conservationists who felt passionately about the Front and industry that was eager to explore its gas potential. The draft EIS was released in August 1996 with the preferred alternative (#7) allowing a one-mile corridor, with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation, to be leased in three areas along the Front. The response to the EIS was overwhelming. Close to 1,500 comments were received, 80 percent of which urged the Forest Service not to lease any part of the Front. With the public comment phase complete, conservationists braced themselves for the final decision.\textsuperscript{55}

In September 1997, Lewis and Clark National Forest issued the Record of Decision. In a landmark move, Gloria Flora chose not to lease any part of the Front—a decision that would be effective for a ten to fifteen year period. Perhaps even more remarkable than the decision itself was the rationale behind it. She had withdrawn the Front not so much out of concerns for wildlife habitat or recreation as out of people's perceptions of the Front:

\textit{A majority of the concerns . . . were expressed regarding the “value of place,” speaking in particular to social and personal values attributed to the Front. It is clear that this is a very unique place to many people . . . Many of those who commented during the process admitted they have not read the environmental analysis and many may not fully understand or care to understand the analysis. They simply want to express emotions about a place they consider special. Many feel that development of any kind, particularly oil and gas development, would “ruin” the feeling of the Front . . . They also feel the need for oil and gas does not outweigh the intrinsic values of the lands in and along the Rocky Mountain Front . . . The Forest has tried to recognize these social and emotional values and they have figured prominently in my decision not to lease the Rocky Mountain Division.}\textsuperscript{56}

Many conservationists rejoiced. For with the exception of the leases on hold in the Badger-Two Medicine, the long conflict to protect the Front from gas development had been won, at least for a while.

But the celebration was brief as yet another threat emerged. In 1997 a man from Thermopolis, Wyoming, by the name of Mark Alldredge filed 104 hard-rock mining claims on 3.4 square miles between Blackleaf and Muddy creeks—an important grizzly corridor. The move puzzled everyone because there had never been a significant mineral discovery anywhere along the Front. Alldredge was not required to declare what he was looking for. Under the antiquated 1872 mining law, a person (or corporation) may make a claim on federal lands and extract minerals free of charge, even gaining title to the land overlying successful claims. While there have been countless attempts to overturn the law (including one by the late Senator Lee Metcalf), corporate and property-rights interests have continually prevented Congress from doing so.\textsuperscript{57}
Some people came to suspect that Allredge’s claims were a dishonest economic venture based on the idea that because they were located in a sensitive location, the Federal government might purchase the claims to protect the area. (The Clinton administration had recently announced that it would pay $40 million to a Canadian company for its claims near Yellowstone.) Gene Sentz wasn’t going to wait to find out. He quickly reformed Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front and they met to draw up a one-page proposal asking the Chief of the Forest Service to request a mineral withdrawal for the Rocky Mountain Front. Then, Sentz and his daughter traveled to Washington, D.C., and hand-delivered the proposal to Chief Mike Dombeck. While there, they also stopped off at the Interior Department and discussed the issue with Assistant Interior Bob Armstrong.58

Evidently Dombeck and Armstrong took the proposal seriously. Over the next year they made separate trips to the Front, both times up Blackleaf Canyon near the mining claims. Meanwhile, Sentz and Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front began a letter-writing campaign, enlisting the support of many, including Senator Max Baucus. Their diligence ultimately paid off. On February 3, 1999, in Missoula, Chief Dombeck announced he was placing a two-year moratorium on mining claims along the Rocky Mountain Front. Over that time an EIS would be compiled to study and receive input on a potentially much longer moratorium. The idea is to use a little known provision of the 1872 law whereby the Secretary of Interior may withdraw an area from new mining claims for up to twenty years.59

Although Dombeck’s moratorium would protect the Front from further mining claims, it would not affect Allredge’s claims, which at the time were the only ones on the forest. The problem remained that if he found an economically valuable mineral he could propose full development of the claims. However, in September the story took an unexpected turn when Allredge forfeited all of his claims by intentionally declining to pay the annual maintenance fee. “I think the state of Montana’s reaction was a big part of my process of deciding to abandon those claims,” he told reporters.60

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59 U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Ranger District History File, Choteau, Mt.


*The Helena Independent,* 4 March 1933, 6.

*West,* *Mini Histories,* 44-45; and Merriam, *The Irony of the Bob,* 82-83.


*U.S. Forest Service,* *Relation of Spruce Beetle Control in Bunker Creek to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area,* USFS Fact Sheet (McEnalphy Collection #172, Box 36, Folder 5, Montana Historical Society, Helena).


Ellis, *A Layman and Wildlife,* 127-34.


Trefethen, *An American Crusade,* 274-75.


Zaslawsky and Watkins, *These American Lands,* 212.

Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 76; Merriam, *The Irony of the Bob,* 85.

Trefethen, *An American Crusade,* 266.

Wallace Stegner, "Wilderness Letter," to David E. Reeman of the University of California’s Wilderness Research Center, 1969, as quoted in Charles E. Wilkinson, *A Tribute to the Man Who Imagined the West We Now Seek To Build,* *High Country News* (3 May 1993), 16.

Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 78-79; Zaslawsky and Watkins, *These American Lands,* 86-90.

Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 83-86.

Ibid., 83; and Cunningham, *Wildland Activism,* 60.


Tom Edwards as quoted in ibid., 16.

Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 86-87.


Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 103-09.

Zaslawsky and Watkins, *These American Lands,* 89.


Dennison, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 172.

Cunningham, *Wildland Activism,* 61.


Cunningham, *Wilderness in the Northern Rockies,* 60; and Burk, "Lee Metcalf," 30.

Trefethen, *An American Crusade,* 297.


"Wolf Recolonization along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front," 1, 5-11; Gary Olson, Interview by author, 21 October 1999; and Don Godred, "Biological Assessment," M-5.


Ibid., and Lisa Flowers, Telephone interview by author, 12 December 1999.

The following discussion is based on information provided by Fish and Wildlife Department Director, Ina New Breast; Ina New Breast, Interview by author, 12 October 1999.

Zaslawsky and Watkins, *These American Lands,* 351-363. Other wilderness areas in the lower forty-eight over one million acres in size include the Everglades (1,296,500 acres) established in 1978 and the Seward-Bitterroot (1,085,017 acres) established in 1964.


Zene Senza, Interview by author, 17 October 1999.


Yetter, *Chronology of Events,* 6-7; Senza, Interview by author.

Carol Bradley, "Impending Oil, Gas Decision Fuels Debate," *Great Falls Tribune,* 13 July 1997, 1; *U.S. Forest Service, Lewis Clark National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision,* (September 1997).

*U.S. Forest Service, Record of Decision,* 5.


Durbin, "Drawing the Line," 10-13; Senza, Interview by author.

Conclusion

The history of conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front is a story that reaches back a century and will continue to unfold for years to come. I have attempted to draw the outline of that history and, in doing so, hopefully shed some light on the question of why the Front has come to be what it is: a place of world-class wildlands and abundant wildlife.

Of course, the answer is not simple. But its foundation rests with the accident of the Front’s geology—the steep, rocky mountains and narrow valleys have proven practically uninhabitable and, with the exception of natural gas, largely devoid of commercially exploitable resources. Many of the things that humans have been so willing to raid land for, such as gold, have been absent or economically prohibitive to obtain on the Front. And unlike areas west of the Divide, timber resources have been either undesirable or too meager and difficult to harvest on a large scale. That is not to say that resources weren’t taken. They were. But relative to the scale of extraction elsewhere, the Front made off pretty well.

Another fundamental factor has been the severity of the Front’s climate. Generally low precipitation coupled with highly erratic temperature and moisture fluctuations, a short growing season, and long, very cold winters have discouraged certain types of development. Although wheat and barley farming are common further east, raising crops near the mountains proved a failure in the early part of this century. Climate probably also has much to do with the conspicuous lack of subdivision here. Along with the remoteness of the Front and good land stewards, the climate—and especially the savage winds—have almost certainly helped to keep out subdivisions.

The continued health of the Front, then, is due in no small part to the scarcity of commercially exploitable resources and the vagaries of geology and climate. It is also due to the relatively low-impact of the Front’s primary industry—ranching. And so the Front has escaped the severity of the raiding and plundering that transformed so many other areas in Montana and elsewhere. These factors have been a blessing—they have laid the foundation upon which people together worked to rebuild a paradise. Although these accidents of wind and rock and ice have helped to maintain its integrity, they cannot ensure its future. Only people can do that—through compassion, hard work, persistence, and vision fueled by a love for wildlife and wild places.
# Appendix I

**Land Ownership on the Rocky Mountain Front**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Type</th>
<th>Square Miles</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RMF Total (E. of Divide)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(incl. 1/3 Glacier):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glacier NP:</td>
<td>1,584</td>
<td>1,013,594</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1/3 of Glacier):</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>337,864</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocky Mtn. RD; LCNF:</td>
<td>1,213</td>
<td>776,259</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMF Wilderness:</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>384,407</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun R. Preserve:</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>195,877</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-designated Roadless:</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>336,628</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total non-wilderness:</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>391,852</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackfeet Reservation:</td>
<td>1,968</td>
<td>1,259,520</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1/3 of Res.):</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>419,840</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**RMF (excluding NF land, **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>including 1/3 of res.):</strong></td>
<td>1,974</td>
<td>1,263,360</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RMF (excluding NF and Res.)</strong>:</td>
<td>1,318</td>
<td>843,520</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal:</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25,600</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM:</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19,200</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRec:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State</strong>:</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>135,600</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Trust Lands:</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>102,349</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMA’s:</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33,251</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun River WMA:</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19,775</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earl Mtn. WMA:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackleaf WMA:</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10,430</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Private</strong>:</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>682,320</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRMR:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pine Butte, NC:</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13,183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCDE</td>
<td>8,906</td>
<td>5,700,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMElk Ecosystem</td>
<td>6,130</td>
<td>3,923,448</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM Wilderness Complex:</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,535,063</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Marshall:</td>
<td>1,577</td>
<td>1,009,356</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Bear:</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>285,771</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoat:</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>239,936</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Abbreviations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RMF</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMRD</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain Ranger District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCNF</td>
<td>Lewis and Clark National Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM</td>
<td>Bureau of Land Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRec.</td>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMA</td>
<td>Wildlife Management Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFWP</td>
<td>Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRMR</td>
<td>Teddy Roosevelt Memorial Ranch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Nature Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCDE</td>
<td>Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>Bob Marshall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** RMF is here defined from the Canadian border south to hwy 200, and from the Continental Divide eastward to hwy 89 and 287. Several of the entries are rough estimates based on counting land ownership areas using the Lewis and Clark National Forest Visitor Map. My counting revealed the following figures: BLM (19,200 acres); Brec (6,400); all State-owned lands (135,600); and total land area (843,520). All other figures were taken from various documents.
Appendix II
Rocky Mountain Front and Bob Marshall Complex Conservation History Timeline

1865 First game law passed by Montana Territorial Legislature: fishing tackle may only consist of pole, line, and hook.

1869 Territorial law passed protecting two game birds: closed season on quail and partridge for three years.

1872 Territorial law passed closing season on game animals: buffalo, moose, elk, deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, antelope, and hares (February 1 to August 15).

1877 Territorial law passed making it illegal to kill game animals for hides alone without using or selling meat and extended protection to fur bears and migratory waterfowl; Montana’s first sportsman’s club founded: the Helena Rifle Club.

1879 Territorial law passed protecting buffalo for ten years in four Montana counties.

1884 Bison extirpated as a result of the robe trade.

1889 Montana gained statehood; law passed making it illegal to kill buffalo for ten years; Legislature passed law providing for Game Wardens (one per county, although by the turn of the century only four counties had made appointments).

1895 Legislature authorized board of Game and Fish Commissioners; game wardens given to counties submitting petitions signed by 100 residents; first bag limits on big game species.

1897 President Grover Cleveland established the Lewis and Clark Forest Reserve; sale of game animals and game birds prohibited by state law.

1901 Montana Legislature established the Montana Fish and Game Department; W. F. Scott appointed first state Fish and Game Warden.

1905 Management of the Forest Reserves turned over to the newly created U.S. Forest Service.

1906 Legislature passed laws setting up a uniform season for all game animals and abolished spring hunting.

1910 On May 11, President William Howard Taft signed the bill creating Glacier National Park; fires rage across the northwest burning some 250,000 acres in the Lewis and Clark National Forest (other major fires occurred in 1889, 1903, 1919, 1926, 1929, and 1940).

1913 Sun River Game Preserve established by the Montana Legislature—the first of five state and private preserves on the Rocky Mountain Front; Legislature authorized the Montana Fish and Game Commission.
1923 Blackleaf Game and Bird Preserve created by Legislature.

1928 Bob Marshall took his first hike through mountainous area later to bear his name (from Swan Range to Holland Lake).

1929 The Forest Service established regulations providing for primitive areas; Gibson Dam completed which inundated part of Sun River Canyon and a major elk migration corridor.

1931 The 625,000-acre South Fork Flathead Primitive Area established by Forest Service chief, R. Y. Stuart; grizzly designated a game animal in Montana (offered protection for first time).

1933 The 95,000-acre Pentagon Primitive Area established by Forest Service Chief F. A. Silcox.

1934 The 240,000-acre Sun River Primitive Area established by F. A. Silcox.

1937 Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid Act passed by Congress (made a portion of the excise tax on guns and ammunition available to states for wildlife restoration projects).

1938 Rathbone v. Montana over landowner conflict with Sun River elk sets precedent for addressing wildlife damages on private land.

1939 Pentagon Primitive Area enlarged.

1940 On August 16th, Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace designated the 950,000-acre Bob Marshall Wilderness by combining the South Fork, Pentagon, and Sun River primitive areas; Bob Cooney became the first state big game manager.

1941 Legislature passed enabling act making Pittman-Robertson Act funds immediately available to the state, revolutionizing state wildlife program; state Fish and Game Commission given authority to regulate hunting seasons and set bag limits; statewide wildlife research program started.

1943 Sun River Conservation Council organized.

1947 Tom Messelt and Carl Malone provided the down payment on 20,000 acres of critical foothill habitat needed by the Sun River elk herd to become the Sun River Game Range.

1953 Sun Butte Dam proposal revived, drawing widespread opposition; Blackleaf Game and Bird Preserve abolished.

1954 Forest Service announced plan to log the Bunker Creek drainage, local residents petition against the plan and ask for 279,000 acres be added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

1958 Montana Wilderness Association founded (first state wilderness conservation group in the nation).

1964 Wilderness Act passed by Congress; Bob Marshall Wilderness afforded statutory protection.

1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act passed by Congress.
1972 Local conservationists persuaded Congress to designate Lincoln-Scapegoat Wilderness Area (first citizen-established Wilderness in the United States).

1973 Congress passed the Endangered Species Act to protect wildlife from extinction.

1976 Portions of South, Middle, and North forks of the Flathead River added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

1977 Citizens for the Great Bear formed to urge Congress to designate as wilderness the upper Flathead River drainage area; Lewis and Clark National Forest issued their first draft management plan proposing to lease much of the Front for oil and gas.

1978 The Great Bear Wilderness established with the help of Montana Senator Lee Metcalf; Teton-Birch creek area of Rocky Mountain Front added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness; The Nature Conservancy began to assemble its Pine Butte Swamp Preserve along the Teton River; Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front form to oppose oil and gas leasing.

1979 First of five acquisitions made to create the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area; Blackfeet tribe adopted 39 bison from the Custer National Wildlife Refuge in Wyoming.

1983 Public pressure and the urging of Montana Representative Pat Williams led to the permanent withdrawal of the Bob Marshall Wilderness from oil and gas exploration.

1984 Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Department instituted first tribal hunting regulations.

1984-1994 In ten separate bills, additions are made to the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

1986 The Boone and Crockett Club purchased 6,000-acre Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch dedicated to research, education, and demonstration; in Bob Marshall Alliance v. Watt, Judge Hatfield ruled that leases in the Deep Creek area would violate National Environmental Protection Act and Endangered Species Act mandates.

1987 Blackfeet Tribal Council adopts a fish and wildlife code.

1993 In response to overwhelming opposition, Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt announced a moratorium on oil and gas development within the Badger-Two Medicine area through 1996.

1995 Forest Service and Fish, Wildlife and Parks Regional Supervisors sign a memorandum adopting an ecosystem-based approach to managing the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

1997 Lewis and Clark National Forest Supervisor Gloria Flora removed the Rocky Mountain Front from new oil and gas leases for a period of ten to fifteen years; Mark Aldredge filed 104 hard-rock mining claims near Blackleaf Canyon leading Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front to appeal to Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck.

1998 Blackfeet began reintroduction of swift fox to reservation.

1999 Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck announced a moratorium on mining on the Rocky Mountain Front; EIS process started to consider a more extended mineral withdrawal; as a result of widespread opposition, Mark Aldredge gives up his mining claims on the Front.