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# Big Guns Want 230,000 Acres Of Gallatins Near Yellowstone Protected As Wilderness

FOUNDER OF PATAGONIA JOINS FORMER U.S. INTERIOR SECRETARY AND DOZENS OF EMINENT SCIENTISTS WHO SAY CAPITAL "W" ESSENTIAL TO SAFEGUARDING WILDLIFE IN CORE OF GREATER YELLOWSTONE

by [Todd Wilkinson](#)



The Gallatin Mountains, stretching between Yellowstone and Bozeman, are wilder than most national parks in the Lower 48 and renowned for their wildlife, yet they lack the landscape protection that other parts at the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem enjoy. Photo courtesy George Wuerthner

It's considered one of the most important land protection questions involving the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in a few generations.

Some of the biggest and most influential names in American landscape conservation are calling upon the U.S. Forest Service to protect a wide swath of the Gallatin Mountains in southwest Montana—a biological puzzle piece considered central to the health of the most iconic large mammal ecosystem in the Lower 48 states.

Daily Sentinel newspaper strongly encouraging the Custer-Gallatin National Forest to adopt a management alternative that safeguards 230,000 acres as new wilderness. The ad featured a letter sent to Congress which was organized by Reed Noss, a pioneer of conservation biology and a researcher who has studied the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, even delivering a report decades ago to The Nature Conservancy and Greater Yellowstone Coalition on biological hotspots in the region.

Among those joining Noss: Patagonia clothing company founder Yvon Chouinard, Dr. Cathy Whitlock, a climate change scientist and member of the National Academies of Sciences, former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, and a list of prominent others—including eminent ecologists and retired federal public land managers. As one signee said, "given the importance of the Gallatins to the health of Yellowstone, this ought to be a national issue, just as protection of national monuments and trying to keep oil and gas development out of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are issues of national importance to the conservation legacy of our country."

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With Custer-Gallatin officials receiving public comments through early June, the signees believe that given a number of converging forces steadily whittling away at the wild fabric Greater Yellowstone, the decision involving the Gallatins is momentous.

Stretching from the rugged northwest corner of Yellowstone National Park northward to the outskirts of bustling Bozeman, the Gallatins, which have no roads crossing their crest, have long been recognized essential habitat for a wide range of species. From migrating elk herds to grizzly bears, wolves, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, moose and someday soon, maybe even wild bison moving out of Yellowstone, they hold an extraordinary roster.

equus.

The Gallatins, which function as a crossroads, are wilder than most national parks and vulnerable to being impacted by growing numbers of people moving to the region and others using it as a playground. Moreover, researchers note that going forward the Gallatins will play a vital role in serving as a refuge for species struggling against the effects of encroaching development and dramatic alterations to habitat brought by climate change. As far back as 1910, Gifford Pinchot, then chief of the Forest Service, wanted to turn the southern Gallatins into a special wildlife refuge.

How much of the Gallatin Range should receive wilderness protection is a source of passionate debate. Motorized recreationists and mountain bikers want less landscape placed under the umbrella of capital W wilderness.



The Porcupine drainage, hub of an expansive wilderness study area, is considered an untrammled crown jewel and will be increasingly important as a refuge for wildlife stressed by climate change. Writes the Montana Wilderness Association: " this corner of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is one of the few places left with nearly the full complement of species that were here when several tribes hunted in the area and when Lewis and Clark made their journey west." Photo courtesy George Wuerthner

Those who gave their imprimatur to the newspaper advertisement, however, favor a plan far more ambitious than one being advanced by three conservation groups, the Wilderness Society, Greater Yellowstone Coalition and Montana Wilderness Association which, along with mountain biking clubs, came together to form an entity called "the Gallatin Partnership."

Critics call the partnership's plan "wilderness lite" and say it favors the desires of growing numbers of outdoor recreationists over the needs of wildlife and solitude.

Another entity, Montanans for Gallatin Wilderness, want 230,000 acres protected while the Sierra Club is calling for 164,500 acres to become wilderness.

Ground zero in the disagreement is how to protect a breathtaking sweep of the Gallatins known as the 151,000-acre Hyalite-Buffalo Horn-Porcupine Wilderness Study Area coming under increasing pressure from user groups in the nearby resort town of Big Sky on the west side of the mountains. Given how elk populations near ski resort towns in Colorado **have been negatively affected** by rising human use, is it wise to promote more industrial-strength recreation in the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine drainages across US Highway 191 from Big Sky?

During the 1990s, Congressional legislation achieved consolidation of public land ownership and eliminated "checkerboarded" private holdings being targeted for industrial logging and real estate development. The intention of conservationists who successfully worked toward that end say the primary objective was to get the Buffalo Horn-Porcupine protected as wilderness.

Not long after, the Forest Service was taken to court for failing to uphold Congressionally-mandated legal requirements obligating it to manage the wilderness study area in a condition that would not jeopardize it becoming a full-fledged wilderness. Despite illegal trespass happening by motorcycle-ATV-snowmobile users and mountain bikers blazing illegal trails—both are not allowed in wilderness—the Forest Service did nothing to halt the incursions until forced to address it.

The agency also has recently acknowledged that today in Greater Yellowstone it has a poor understanding of what swelling numbers of outdoor recreationists mean for sensitive species such as grizzlies, wolverines, elk in their calving grounds and other animals with a low tolerance for human disturbance. The Custer-Gallatin has recommended setting aside less than 100,000 acres of the Gallatins as wilderness.

Some 61 years ago, in 1958, the renowned Jackson Hole elk biologist Olaus Murie wrote a letter to the Forest Service following a camping trip he took with his wife, Mardy, and others via horseback into the Gallatin mountains. Murie, who had been national director of The Wilderness Society, reminded that the Forest Service had historically been central to safeguarding wilderness for future generations and none ever regretted it.

Murie was struck by the high caliber of terrain in the Gallatins, home to a world-famous elk herd, and he encouraged forest managers to put it off limits to traditional multiple use management. "I



The view north from Ramshorn Peak—terrain breathtaking even to Olaus Murie, a leader and charter member of The Wilderness Society

As a result, the Gallatin area impressed me strongly as being preeminently suitable for such designation without encroachment on other interests.”

A major advocate for creation of The Wilderness Act, Murie died in October 1963, just months shy of that landmark bill’s passage and signing into law in 1964.

*Mountain Journal* soon will be publishing a multi-part series on the importance of the Gallatin Range and how it represents a national bellwether for foresighted public land management. Meantime, below is an incomplete list of those individuals whose names appeared in the letter to Congress and newspaper ad.

### **Text of letter to members of Congress and signees below**

Dear Member of Congress:

As biologists, wildlife advocates, and members of the scientific community, we are writing to express our strong support for maintaining the ecological integrity of the Gallatin Range by establishing a 230,000-acre or larger wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Wilderness designation is recognized as the “Gold Standard” for preserving wildlands and ecological values.

The scientific community recognizes that large protected areas with connectivity to other large protected patches is the best way to preserve high-quality wildlife habitat and permit the continued influence of ecological processes like wildfire, predation, migration, and other natural influences.

The Gallatin Range is the most significant unprotected wildlands in the northern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In particular, the Buffalo Horn and Porcupine (BHP) drainages that lie immediately north of Yellowstone National Park are critical to the biotic fidelity of the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The Buffalo Horn-Porcupine was recognized early on for its wildlife values. In 1910 Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot advocated protecting the southern Gallatin Range as a wildlife refuge. A year later, the state of Montana created a wildlife refuge in the Buffalo Horn and

The Buffalo Horn Porcupine area has some of the best grizzly bear habitat outside of Yellowstone National Park. It is also vital elk winter range and a migration corridor.

These drainages also support bighorn sheep, moose, mountain goat, wolverine, cougar, wolf, and mule deer. Both of these drainages also possess native Westslope cutthroat trout, a species once proposed for listing under the ESA. According to the Montana Heritage Program, 18 birds, eight mammals, three fish, three amphibians, and one reptile as "at risk" or declining in numbers, demonstrating the need to provide the most durable protection possible for this area.

It has long been recognized by the scientific community that protected areas in isolation fail to preserve species and ecosystem processes adequately. Wildlife corridors provide connectivity, sustaining vital natural processes, wildlife populations, and biodiversity while allowing species to move in response to climate change. The Gallatin Range is a recognized wildlife corridor linking YNP to the Northern Continental Ecosystem.

Signed:

Reed Noss, Ph.D., Conservation Biologist, Visiting Scholar Duke University, President Florida Institute for Conservation Science, Oviedo, FL

Bruce Babbitt, JD, Former Secretary of the Interior, 1993- 2001, and former Governor of Arizona, Washington, DC

Dr. James A Bailey, Retired Wildlife Biologist Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

Joel Berger PhD, Wildlife Conservation Society Cox Chair of Conservation Biology Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

Robert L Beschta PhD, Professor Emeritus, Forest Ecosystems and Society Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR

Norman A. Bishop, National Park Ranger, 1961-1997, Bozeman, Montana

Denise Boggs, Executive Director, Conservation Congress, Billings, MT

Lou Bruno, Founder, Glacier Two Medicine Alliance, East Glacier, MT

Dale Burk, Stoneydale Press and Lifelong Wilderness Advocate, Stevensville, MT

Stoney Burk JD, Choteau, MT

John G. Carter PhD, Ecologist Yellowstone to Uintas Connection, Paris, ID

Douglas H. Chadwick MS, Wildlife Biologist and Writer, Whitefish, MT

Wayne Chamberlin Helena MT

Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia, Ventura, CA

Mike Clark, Former Executive Director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Bozeman, MT

Susan Clark PhD, founder Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative Jackson, WY Adjunct Professor, School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University, New Haven, CT

Lance Craighead PhD Executive Director, Craighead Institute, Bozeman, MT

Scott Creel PhD, Professor, Conservation Biology and Ecology Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

Bill Cunningham, Outfitter, retired field rep The Wilderness Society, MWA retired, Choteau, MT

John Davis, Executive Director, The ReWilding Institute Albuquerque, NM

Capt. William B Davis and Marsha Carter Davis, Helena MT

Natalie Dawson PhD, Former Director, Wilderness Institute WA Franke College of Forestry & Conservation University of Montana, Missoula, MT

Ann Debolt MS, Sagebrush Restoration Specialist, Boise, ID

Dominick DellaSala PhD President & Chief Scientist Geos Institute, Ashland, OR  
Diane Debinski PhD, Department Head of Ecology, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

David Delehanty PhD, Professor, Ornithology, Animal Behavior, Conservation Biology Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID

Michele Dietrich, Friends of the Bitterroot, Butte, MT

Debra Donahue JD, Professor Emeritus, College of Law University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY

Dick Dorworth Author, Bozeman MT

ARON D. SHORE MS, RETIRED WILDERNESS COUNCIL, BOB HANCOCK WILDERNESS AREA,  
Missoula, MT

Al Espinosa MS, USFS Fisheries Scientist, retired Moscow, ID

Mary Fay, Wilderness Supporter, Helena, MT

Mike Finley, former Yellowstone Superintendent, former President/CEO of Turner  
Foundation, and former Chairman of the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission, Medford, OR

Jerry Freilich PhD, Retired National Park Service, Olympic National Park and Grand Teton  
National Park, Port Angeles, WA

Christopher Frissell PhD, Affiliate Research Prof., Flathead Lake Biological Station,  
University of MT Principal Scientist, Frissell & Raven LLC Polson, MT

Barrie Gilbert PhD. Senior Scientist, retired, Department of Wildland Resources, Utah State  
University, Logan, Utah

Dennis Glick MS, Conservationist, Livingston, MT

Joe Gutkoski, Retired Forest Service Landscape Architect, Smoke Jumper, conservation leader,  
Bozeman, MT

Rick Halsey, Director, Chaparral Institute, Escondido, CA

Andrew Hansen PhD, Landscape Biodiversity Lab Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

Kathy Hansen PhD, retired geographer, Department of Earth Sciences, Montana State  
University, Bozeman

Ann Harvey, Research Associate, Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative, Jackson, WY

Randy Hayes, Executive Director, Foundation Earth Founder, Rainforest Action Network,  
Washington, DC

Ned Hettinger PhD, Professor Emeritus, Philosophy College of Charleston, Charleston, SC

Glenn Hockett Rangeland Ecologist President, Gallatin Wildlife Association, Bozeman, MT

Steve Hoffman PhD, Founder, Hawkwatch International, Bozeman, MT



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Carole King, singer-songwriter, inductee Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Grammy Award Winner, wilderness advocate, 42-year resident of Idaho, Stanley, Idaho

Phil Knight, Gallatin Yellowstone Wilderness Alliance, Bozeman, MT

Angela Kociolek, MS, conservation biologist, former road ecology research scientist, Montana State University

Bart Koehler, M.S. Natural Resource Sciences and Planning, University of Wyoming; former Senior Wilderness Campaigns Director, The Wilderness Society; former Director of The Wilderness Society's Wilderness Support Center; former Associate Program Director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition; co-founder, Wyoming Wilderness Association

Matthew Koehler, WildWest Institute, Missoula, MT

Derek Lee PhD Principal Scientist, Wild Nature Institute Assoc. Research Professor Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA

Harvey Locke Co-Founder Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, Banff, AL, Canada

Thomas E Lovejoy PhD, Professor Environmental Science & Policy George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

Al Luebeck, Stream Access Law Beaverhead & Pioneer Mountains, Butte, MT

Ara Marderosian, Executive Director, Sequoia ForestKeeper® Kernville, CA

Vance G Martin, President, Wild Foundation Boulder, CO

David Mattson PhD, Retired leader, CO Plateau Research Station & Research Wildlife Biologist USGS, Lecturer & Senior Visiting Scientist, Yale University, former member Yellowstone Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, Livingston, MT

Ralph Maughan, Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID

Bruce Maxwell PhD, Land Resources and Environmental Scientists Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

DAVID BRUCE / THE WILDERNESS FOUNDATION, LAS VEGAS, NV

G Wayne Minshall PhD, Professor Emeritus, Ecology Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID

Erik Molvar MS, Wildlife Biologist Laramie, WY

Glenn Monahan, former science teacher and National Park Service ranger, Member Geological Society, Bozeman, MT

Joan Montagne, Madison Gallatin Alliance, former board member Montana Wilderness Alliance and Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Bozeman, MT

Blaine Mooers PhD, Associate Professor, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

Susan Morgan PhD, The Rewilding Institute, Albuquerque, NM

George Nickas, Executive Director, Wilderness Watch, Missoula, MT

Barry R Noon PhD, Professor Emeritus, Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

Dennis Odion PhD, Earth Research Institute, UC Santa Barbara Santa Barbara, CA

Marilyn Olsen, Wilderness Guide/ Outfitter Big Wild Adventures Emigrant, MT

Nancy Ostlie, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Bozeman, MT

David Parsons MS, Carnivore Conservation Biologist The Rewilding Institute, Washington, DC

Debra Patla MS, Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative and independent wildlife researcher, Moran, WY

Doug Peacock, retired Green Beret Medic, Author and Grizzly Bear Advocate, Livingston MT

James Peek PhD, Fish and Wildlife Science, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID

Dr. Kenneth L Pierce, Affiliate Professor of Geology, USGS, Emeritus Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

Jim Posewitz, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks retired, Cinnabar Foundation, Helena, MT

Thomas Pringle PhD, Sperling Foundation, Tucson, AZ

Kevin Proescholdt, Conservation Director, Wilderness Watch, Minneapolis, MN

Richard P Reading PhD, Director of Research & Conservation, Butterfly Pavilion Affiliate Faculty, Colorado State University Fort Collins, CO

Rick Reese, Principal Founder & 3-term president, Greater Yellowstone Coalition board, former director, The Yellowstone Institute, Bozeman, MT

Barry Reiswig, Refuge Manager, retired National Elk Refuge Jackson, WY

Rick Ridgeway, Patagonia, Ventura, CA

William Ripple PhD, Distinguished Professor of Ecology, Dept of Forest Ecosystems and Society Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR

Ross Rodgers, former president, Montana Wilderness Association

Teddy Roe, Legislative Assistant to the late U.S. Sen. Lee Metcalf, Billings MT

Jim Rokosch, Water Resource Specialist Former Ravalli County Commissioner, Stevensville, MT

Roger Rosentreter PhD, BLM State Botanist, retired Boise, ID

Joseph Scalia, Psy.D, Psychoanalyst and conservationist, Livingston, MT

Gene Sentz, Key conservationist involved with effort to protect the Rocky Mountain Front and longtime member Montana Wilderness Association, Choteau, MT

Shelley Silbert, Executive Director, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Durango, CO

Bruce Smith PhD, Former Senior Wildlife Biologist, National Elk Refuge, and author of several wildlife books, Bozeman, MT

Linda Stoll, Montana Wilderness Alliance member, former Montana state legislator, Helena, MT

Michael Vandeman PhD, Lecturer, San Ramon, CA

Back Watch, and the 1950s Southern Range, etc.

Gary Weiner MS, Retired National Park Service,, Landscape Architect, Bozeman, MT

Cathy Whitlock PhD, Department of Earth Sciences. Montana State University, and Member of National Academy of Sciences, Bozeman MT

David Wilcove PhD, Professor, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, Princeton NJ

Louisa Willcox MS, Founder, Grizzly Times, former Program Director, Greater Yellowstone Coalition; and grizzly bear specialist with Natural Resources Defense Council and Sierra Club, Livingston, MT

Howie Wolke Wilderness Guide/ Outfitter, Former President of Wilderness Watch, co-founder Wyoming Wilderness Association, Emigrant, MT

George Wuerthner, Ecologist, Public Lands Media, former senior strategist with The Foundation for Deep Ecology, founder of Mountain Bikers for Wilderness, Livingston, MT



#### About **Todd Wilkinson**

Todd Wilkinson, founder of *Mountain Journal*, is author of the book *Ripple Effects: How to Save Yellowstone and American's Most Iconic Wildlife Ecosystem*. Wilkinson has been writing about Greater Yellowstone for 35 years and is a correspondent to publications ranging from *National Geographic* to *The Guardian*. He is

author of several books on topics as diverse as scientific whistleblowers and Ted Turner, and a book about the harrowing story of Jackson Hole grizzly mother 399, the most famous bear in the world which features photographs by Thomas Mangelsen. For more information on Wilkinson, [click here](#). (Photo by David J Swift).

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