



February 10, 2009

Letters to the Editor - Deep support for purchase legislation

On Jan. 26, my wife and I traveled to Helena to attend a hearing on HB 14, popularly known as the Montana Working Forests Bill. This bill provides a mechanism through which the state of Montana could purchase some of the lands in western Montana owned by Plum Creek. The purchase of these lands, facilitated by the issuing of general obligation bonds, would allow the state Land Board to acquire additional school trust lands, which would be maintained as working forest lands. As such, these forest lands would provide additional long-term revenue for school systems throughout Montana.

For the folks who live and work in rural western Montana, a constant, sustainable timber supply is an essential part of life. In these times of economic recession, the demand for forest products has severely diminished. Mills have laid off employees or shut down completely, creating uncertainties for our way of life. However, this situation will not last. If we lose these lands, which have historically been working timberlands to development and subdivisions, their potential for future timber supply will be forever lost. Beyond their economic value as working forests, these lands provide wildlife habitat and opportunities for public recreation. In short, these lands embody the values we so deeply cherish.

At the hearing, I was struck by the deep and sincere support HB 14 received from a wide range of supporters, including mill owners and workers, loggers, ranchers, hunters, outdoor recreationists and residents. I am concerned that if we, the state, do not protect these lands as Montana working forests, we will forever lose a golden opportunity.

For the sake of Montana's future generations, I request all legislators to support this excellent bill.

Steve Ellis, Bigfork