



Bill would allow purchase for less than \$900 an acre

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The Montana Legislature is considering a bill to fund the purchase of prime timber and recreation lands in the Potomac area. Formerly owned by Plum Creek Timber Co., these lands are now available for sale to the state of Montana. I attended the Jan. 26 hearing of the House Natural Resources Committee, along with 74 other supporters, when House Bill 14 was introduced by Republican Rep. Bill Nooney.

If passed, this bill will enable the state of Montana to purchase about 26,000 acres for less than \$900 an acre. I'm not sure all of our legislators understand the significance of this land deal. Not only is the price per acre amazingly low, these lands contribute to western Montana's economic engine. Our economy is dependent to a large extent on timber and recreation. We need to secure these lands in order to support our economic base. It's not a question of acquiring new timber and recreation lands. It's about not losing ground.

Thirty-three people - loggers, outfitters, mill owners, hunters, wildlife advocates, ranchers and economic development experts - testified about the importance of acquiring the Potomac lands. I hope Montana citizens will urge their legislators to support this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. These lands grow trees. They will provide jobs for our local mills long after we rebound from the current economic decline, and they will be open for public access to fuel our recreation economy. We can't afford not to purchase the Potomac lands.

Anne Dahl, Condon

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