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A PROPOSAL FOR CITIZEN MANAGEMENT OF THE UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT

I. Overview: Avoiding the War of the Inkpots

The challenge of developing an effective conservation plan for the recently created Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument lies in melding the national interest in preserving this historic area with the state and local interest in ensuring that people who live, work and recreate near the river corridor receive fair consideration.

The national interest lies in maintaining this free-flowing section of the Missouri River in its natural state as a living monument to the spirit of the people who founded our country and expanded its horizons. The American public connects with the adventuresome spirit of the Corps of Discovery and seeks to memorialize Lewis and Clark's role in the exploration of our country. There can be no question that the wildest remaining section of the Missouri River is the ideal place to showcase that history.

On the other hand, in the nearly two hundred years since Lewis and Clark paddled, poled and dragged their boats along the Missouri, many changes have taken place. Numerous impoundments have been constructed to harness the Missouri's wandering ways. These dams have changed the river's flow regime and have significantly influenced fish, wildlife and streamside vegetation. The corridor also has become an important agricultural region, with grain production affecting upland prairies and cattle grazing influencing riparian vegetation. Much of the landscape surrounding the river is now privately owned, and though current second-home

and subdivision development is minimal, that could change as the area receives increased attention due to its new national designation. In addition, the monument could receive significant increases in recreational use associated with the Lewis and Clark bicentennial. And finally, oil and gas exploration and development has the potential to diminish the natural qualities of the river.

A successful conservation plan for this national monument must do more than re-create the landscape that Lewis and Clark passed through two hundred years ago. It must also embrace the ecological reality that humans are an important part of the landscape and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Gaining the support and cooperation of those people who use this area most will contribute significantly to the monument's effective conservation.

Maintaining the historic and ecological significance of this section of the Missouri River through national monument designation is an important and appropriate role of our federal government. But that same federal government that often makes effective broad decisions sometimes stumbles in the precise implementation of its directives. Local solutions empower people most knowledgeable about the specific landscape to make decisions.

The best strategy for ensuring that the needs and concerns of local people receive full consideration is to provide them with a meaningful role in actual management of the monument plan. My proposal calls for joint management of this Missouri River National Monument by a 12-person committee composed of local citizens, state officials and federal representatives. Citizens would have the majority of seats on the committee. The Citizen Management Committee (CMC) would consist of a cross-section of interests reflecting a balance of viewpoints. Members would be selected from locations across Montana, based on a knowledge of resource issues as well as a commitment to collaborative decision making.

It may be inappropriate to label such an approach as “innovative,” given that pioneer conservationist Aldo Leopold suggested a similar method for resolving difficult natural resource issues nearly 65 years ago. In a 1936 essay about protecting rare animals entitled “Threatened Species”, Leopold suggested that government agencies should form committees of diverse public interests to define the needs of endangered species. He viewed cooperation between the government and private citizens as essential to conservation and voiced optimism about the inherent tendency of humans to do what is right for wildlife and the land.

Summarizing his own view of how citizens might take the lead in conservation, Leopold wrote: “I am satisfied that thousands of enthusiastic conservationists would be proud of such a public trust, and many would execute it with fidelity and intelligence. I can see in this setup more conservation than could be bought with millions of new dollars, more coordination of bureaus than Congress can get by new organization charts, more genuine contacts between factions than will ever occur in the war of the inkpots...”

II. Rationale: Citizen Management Makes Local People Part of the Solution

Over the last twenty years a new approach to resolving polarized natural resource issues has emerged both in the United States and other parts of the world. It relies on collaboration, a consensus process where informed stakeholders come together and seek solutions. Important national examples include the Quincy Library Group and the Malpai-Borderlands Project. Some people mistakenly label such processes as “compromise,” with the insinuation that each side must give up much of what they really want and that neither party emerges truly satisfied. The real objective of collaboration is to craft solutions where most participants get what they want.

Experience has shown that collaboration is most effective in situations where the resource issue has well-defined geographic boundaries. The area can be as small as an individual timber

sale or as large as a national forest. Collaboration has proven less effective when engaging broad policy issues such as energy planning or endangered species protection. The 377,346 acre Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument plainly falls into the category of a defined geographic entity.

Collaboration is an inherently democratic process where all parties have a chance to express their views. Additionally, the close working relationships inherent in this approach require participants to work harder at understanding and accommodating divergent viewpoints. Perhaps most importantly, the collaborative process leads people to focus on a community of interests rather than their personal concerns.

Some Montanans have been painted as opponents of conservation because of their concern for maintaining existing human uses along the Missouri River. If through a collaborative process these same people can come to feel that the conservation goals of a monument plan are consistent with their own vision of how this area should be managed, they will become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem.

At the same time, some people worry that delegating federal responsibilities to a citizen management committee (CMC) could result in a capitulation to economic interests and a failure to honor the national directives inherent in monument establishment. To be responsive to this legitimate concern, the Secretary of the Interior must stand ready to reassume monument management authority if 1) the CMC takes actions not in compliance with the presidential proclamation establishing the monument; or 2) if the CMC takes actions not in compliance with the Bureau of Land Management's responsibilities under federal law.

The CMC should consist of twelve members. Eight should be Montana citizens, two should be representatives of state agencies (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and

the Montana Department of State Lands) and two should be representatives of federal agencies (Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). The committee will have essentially the same relationship to the Bureau of Land Management that a state fish and wildlife commission has to a state wildlife agency. It will set broad policy while the agency conducts day- to-day management activities.

A few ground rules are essential. All important viewpoints must be represented. The committee must have a balance of interests. Participants need to have a commitment to collaborative decision making. And most importantly, all participants need to understand that the process is the entire and exclusive arena for decisions. This means that state and federal agencies, governors, Secretaries of the Interior and senators and congressmen must endorse this process. Agreements made by this committee cannot be circumvented. No collaborative process can succeed if parties have the opportunity to get what they want in an alternate forum.

One of the most critical aspects of any collaboration lies in ensuring it has a legitimate balance of interests. In most cases, we must rely on elected officials to appoint members of collaborative groups, which can allow politics to creep into the selection process. In the case of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, however, we are fortunate to have a nonpolitical body that is the ideal group to construct a balanced citizen management committee.

The BLM's Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) contains a diverse mix of Montana citizens and has shown an ability to work collaboratively on difficult problems. In 1999 former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt asked the Central Montana RAC to make recommendations regarding the future of the Missouri River and Missouri River Breaks. Working on a short schedule, this committee was able to reach consensus agreement on more than a dozen major issues. The RAC failed to find agreement on only a handful of concerns, and likely would have reached agreement on those with more time.

In fact, a strong argument could be made for having the existing Central Montana RAC be designated as the citizen management authority for the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. But to the extent the RAC already has a very full plate, and to the extent it would mix an advisory role with a management role, it doesn't seem feasible. But the Central Montana RAC is precisely the right body to select the eight citizen members for the CMC. It understands through direct experience the mix of interests and viewpoints necessary to make effective decisions. Appointments for the state agencies should be made by the governor of Montana and the appointments for the federal agencies should be made by the Secretary of the Interior.

After the CMC is selected, it needs to receive its charge from both state and federal officials in a manner that acknowledges and respects both local and national needs. The committee must have a clearly articulated overarching mission, a guiding principle that members can use as a touchstone to remind them of their responsibilities. That statement might read: "The Citizen Management Committee shall manage the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in a state that maintains to the fullest extent practical the landscape that Lewis and Clark saw when they passed through, while respecting the needs of local people and the economies of local communities."

The committee will work closely with the Bureau of Land Management on the development of a formal national monument plan. This document must be developed in full accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The document must review all existing and potential uses on the monument, including recreation, grazing, oil and gas leasing and mineral development.

The administrative costs of maintaining the CMC should be shared by state and federal agencies. To the extent state governments desire a larger voice in federal decision making, they must be willing to share the costs of assuming such responsibilities.

Most national monuments receive a line item in the federal budget. The CMC should use a portion of its line item to initiate an incentive program for landowners and permittees. This incentive fund would be used for cost sharing on projects that help these people modify their operations in ways that contribute to maintaining the naturalness and ecological health of the monument.

For example, studies have shown that cattle grazing is influencing vegetation near the river (especially cottonwood regeneration) and that presence of livestock and their waste materials is diminishing the recreational experience for floaters. The CMC should use the incentive fund to implement range improvement projects -- such as development of off-river water sources and construction of fences -- that would move livestock from the river corridor to upland benches during the high-use summer season.

Similarly, the incentive fund could be used to control weed proliferation on private lands or to develop rest-rotation grazing systems that would create healthier rangelands. An incentive fund also could be used in more novel ways. It could provide funds to encourage willing ranchers to experiment with raising bison instead of cattle. It could provide funds to encourage willing landowners to preserve prairie dog towns on private lands. The incentive fund could be used for any project that measurably increases the naturalness and ecological health of the monument. It would be the responsibility of the CMC to prioritize those opportunities and decide which projects should be funded.

Federal funds should also be used to assist land trusts in obtaining conservation easements on key private lands where the potential for subdivision and second-home development is high. While BLM should not condemn private property and it should ensure that access to private parcels in the monument is maintained, the CMC needs to have a budget for obtaining easements. Conservation easement purchases can help maintain traditional agricultural use while respecting the public open space values. Such easements recognize the significant role private ranching and farming families have provided over the years in the maintenance and stewardship of the 33,000 acres of private lands within the river corridor.

To the extent that the Missouri River corridor is currently a national fee demonstration area, the CMC should also have the authority to set fees for recreational use. A portion of these fees should be recaptured and returned to the incentive fund which would be reinvested in projects that assist landowners and permittees in developing a more natural Missouri River National Monument.

Finally, while the monument proclamation prohibits further energy or mineral leasing, the citizen committee should work closely with existing leaseholders to ensure their rights are respected and the natural values of the monument are maintained. Current information indicates that natural gas is the only commodity that has significant development potential. Over the next decade, it can be expected that the CMC will develop an informed view of the feasibility of maintaining environmental quality within the monument in the face of natural gas development. Ten years from its creation date, it should be a duty of the citizen committee to make a recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior regarding whether or not to maintain the existing prohibition on the leasing of minerals and oil and gas.

III. Identification of Actions Needed for Implementation: The Nuts and Bolts

The most critical part of any new monument management proposal lies in effective implementation. This step separates the practical from the wishful. It is the most important part of the plan because it is the hardest to accomplish. Simply saying that a new law must be passed in no way reflects the difficulty or complexity of doing so. Therefore, the implementation plan must be as carefully conceived as the management concept.

The most serious shortcoming of nearly all of our major natural resource laws is that they contain almost no room for experimentation. It's unrealistic to think our legislators are going to get the nuances of a law exactly right on its initial passage. While Congress intended that the reauthorization process for many natural resource laws would provide the opportunity for legislative fine-tuning, environmental debates have become so polarized that there is little chance for adaptive modification.

Concurrently, our legal system tends to hamper change and reinforce the status quo. Innovation is difficult, even when many agree a new approach is desirable. As Machiavelli explained so well in The Prince: "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct or more uncertain of its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and only lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new."

Exploring the Administrative Option

As I started thinking about how to implement a citizen management approach to national monument management, my initial preference was to seek an administrative implementation strategy rather than a legislative one. The reason is plain and practical. Leaders of the monument planning team from the Lewistown BLM office informed me that they plan to produce a draft monument management plan within the next 18 months (an interim management

plan has already been released). Consequently, for a new monument management approach to have any serious chance of consideration, it must have a short implementation fuse. Any kind of complex legislation is unlikely to travel through the Washington legislative arena in a timely enough manner for BLM to include it in its draft management plan.

But problems immediately arose. Upon reviewing BLM statutes, I was unable to find any well-traveled administrative path through which the Bureau could delegate its monument management authority to a citizen committee. One of my first calls was to Karen Dunigan, the solicitor for the Department of the Interior in Billings. She was unequivocal that BLM could not delegate its authority in this manner. I next spoke to Dan Kemmis, director of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, who also felt an administrative approach probably wasn't feasible. He did, however, refer me to Robert Nelson of the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland, who is working on a paper that explores new approaches to national monument management.

Nelson believes an administrative approach is feasible, and suggested I speak to Larry Finfer, associate director for BLM in Washington, DC, for more specific details on implementation. Finfer said that the Federal Land and Policy Management Act (FLPMA) provides for creation of cooperative agreements between BLM and private parties, and that a citizen management committee might be created through that authority. He suggested that I speak to Jesse Juen, director of BLM cooperative projects in Washington, for additional insight.

Mr. Juen agreed that cooperative agreements were a possible path for creation of a citizen management committee, but when I asked for specific cooperative agreements that might serve as a template, Mr. Juen conceded there weren't many good models. He referred me to the Grand Staircase-Escalante Resource Management Plan (which is BLM's most recent monument management plan), but it does not deal with delegation of BLM authority.

Finally, I met with the leaders of the BLM Lewistown District office's monument management team -- Dave Mari, Gary Slagel and Craig Flentie -- to solicit their views on specific procedures for how BLM could delegate its monument management authority to a citizen committee. I referenced the cooperative agreement provisions of FLPMA. They plainly were uncomfortable with this approach and said they had never encountered a situation where the provision had been used in such a manner.

It became obvious that while it might be possible to advance a citizen management proposal administratively, doing so likely would engender resistance not only from the public, but potentially from BLM staff and solicitors. It would almost certainly invite legal challenges that might take years to resolve. I concluded that an administrative approach probably wasn't feasible and that pursuing this approach would not meet my criterion of developing an implementation strategy with a short fuse.

Turning to Legislative Options

Next I began to research legislative implementation strategies. It's critical to understand that not all legislative approaches are equal in terms of the complexity and difficulty of shepherding them through Congress. Most difficult is free-standing legislation that implements permanent change to existing resource law. Intermediate is passage of "pilot project" legislation that authorizes agencies to experiment with resource management in a specific area for a specific period of time. Least difficult is attaching an amendment to an appropriations bill with specific legislative direction.

In my view, trying to pass free-standing legislation to create a new, permanent management scenario for the Missouri River National Monument would be unattainable in the

current highly-polarized climate for natural resource issues that exists in Washington, DC. Early comments made by the Bush Administration about “undoing” some of the Clinton Administration’s monument designations have heightened divisiveness and reduced the likelihood for major changes in management of national monuments.

The pilot project approach has considerably more promise, primarily because it dovetails with another project that’s been in progress for more than a year. Several institutions, including the University of Wyoming’s Institute for the Environment and Natural Resources and the University of Montana’s Center for the Rocky Mountain West, are encouraging legislation that authorizes pilot projects to examine alternative ways to implement the National Environmental Policy Act. These projects, like my proposal, focus on collaboration as a primary means of resolving disputes.

At the request of U.S. Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Mike Crapo (R-ID), Harry Reid (D-NV) and Craig Thomas (R-WY), the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, a governmental institution, has been assigned to explore how pilot projects can be used to determine how collaboration and dispute resolution processes can improve the implementation of NEPA. This effort was announced in a May 11, 2001, Federal Register Notice.

Under this scenario, a possible implementation strategy would be that a pilot project for the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument (and potentially, other national monuments) would be folded into the same package as the NEPA pilot projects. This approach is attractive because of the important ground that already has been plowed: bipartisan support already has been developed for the NEPA pilots and several well-respected western universities and institutions are involved.

On the negative side, however, this implementation strategy would link national monument experimentation with NEPA experimentation. Only a handful of environmental groups are likely to resist small-scale experimentation with management of national monuments. But because NEPA is so broad and affects so many interests, it is likely that nearly all environmental interests will strongly resist changes to NEPA, even in the context of experimentation. Consequently, linking experimentation with national monument management to NEPA pilot projects might result in too much opposition and reduce the likelihood of success for either project.

The Best Chance: Single-Purpose Legislation Attached to Appropriations

In my view, the best chance for implementation of a citizen-directed Missouri River National Monument plan lies in simple, single-purpose legislation that could be attached to next year's Appropriation Bill. The model for this is a Montana-initiated natural resource experiment known as the Land Stewardship Demonstration Project that was authorized by Section 347 of the 1999 Appropriations Bill. This bill authorized the Forest Service to initiate 28 demonstration projects nationwide (9 in the Forest Service's Northern Region, which is centered on Montana). The purpose was to see if harvest of forest products could be combined with land restoration activities in a manner that accomplishes ecosystem restoration.

Because this demonstration project involves timber harvest on national forests, it was controversial by definition. But proponents of this experimentation were able to move it through Congress expeditiously by doing three things: 1) Securing the support of the administration and the lead agency; 2) Securing the support of Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), a key player on the Appropriations Committee; and 3) Securing the support of Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) to deflect criticism from environmental interests.

Gaining the support of the Bush Administration for experimentation with national monument management seems achievable. On March 29, 2001, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton wrote a letter to members of the Montana Congressional Delegation soliciting their advice for charting the future of the national monuments. Ms. Norton wrote in her letter, "It is my goal, in working with interested parties such as yourself, to identify the activities that are best suited to the needs of local residents and others. The Department would like to work cooperatively with you and others in your state to form a partnership to ensure that these National Monuments are administered in a way that takes into account not only national interest, but local needs and concerns as well."

Moreover, in her confirmation hearings and in consequent news stories, Ms. Norton has reiterated several beliefs: 1) she is interested in "outside the box" thinking; 2) she supports devolution of federal responsibilities to a local and state level; and 3) she favors collaboration as a process for resolving conflict.

Both Senators Burns and Baucus have voiced support for engaging local citizens more closely in federal resource issues. In fact, on an issue far more controversial than national monument management -- the restoration of grizzly bears to western Montana and central Idaho -- both have supported a citizen management approach directly analogous to the proposal set forth in this paper. The likelihood of gaining their support for such a proposal for an Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument appears high.

In sum, passing simple, single-purpose legislation through attachment to the Appropriations Bill has a strong chance for success for several reasons: 1) the Bush Administration has stated publicly that it wants to influence monument management; 2) centrists in Congress are more likely to approve of experimentation than changes to existing presidential proclamations; 3) the Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee has effectively

demonstrated that Montana citizens are capable of making responsible, sensible decisions about Missouri River management issues; and 4) Senators Burns and Baucus should be favorably inclined to support citizen management of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. And finally, this approach meets the key criteria of having a short implementation fuse. Such legislation could be attached to the Appropriations Bill either in 2001 or 2002.

IV. Draft Amendment to the Appropriations Bill

The following is a draft amendment for the Appropriations Bill that would implement my citizen management approach for the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

Sec. xxx. Missouri River National Monument Citizen Management Demonstration Project. (a) In General.--Until September 30, 2012, the Bureau of Land Management shall delegate its authority on an experimental basis to a citizen committee for management of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The committee shall adhere to the presidential proclamation of January 17, 2001, as well as all applicable state and federal law. The purpose of the committee shall be to manage the monument in a manner that maintains to the fullest extent practical the landscape that Lewis and Clark saw when they passed through, while respecting the needs of local people and the economies of local communities. The Bureau must retain ultimate management responsibility for the national monument, and must reassume management authority if the actions of the citizen committee do not reflect the intent of the presidential proclamations or appropriate federal laws.

b) Management Goals.--The goals of the committee shall be to:

- (1) protect both the river and the adjacent uplands to secure the area's wild and solitary values;
- (2) maintain the area's rural character and family ranching history; and

(3) maintain high quality floating, hiking, camping, fishing and hunting.

c) Specific Land Management Duties.--The citizen management committee may develop broad management goals for the entire range of resource issues concerning the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument which may include but is not limited to--

(1) sustaining ecological functions;

(2) recreation, including management of floaters and outfitters as well as development of recreational infrastructure;

(3) grazing, particularly as it influences the river corridor;

(4) control of noxious and exotic weeds and reestablishment of native plant species;

(5) motorized vehicle use, both on the river and the uplands, as well as overflights by airplanes;

(6) mineral and energy exploration and development;

(7) development of private lands as it influences the monument; and

(8) flow regimes for the Missouri River.

d) Structure of the Citizen Management Committee.--The committee shall be composed of 12 people, including 8 Montana citizens and representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Department of State Lands. The 8 citizen representatives will be selected by the Bureau of Land Management's Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee. They should consist of a cross-section of interests representing a balance of viewpoints, and should be selected for their diversity of knowledge and experience in natural resource issues, and for their commitment to collaborative decision-making. National viewpoints as well as local ones should be represented. The federal representatives on the committee will be selected by the Secretary of the Interior and the state representatives by the Governor of Montana. Members of the citizen committee shall serve four year terms and these terms may be staggered at the discretion of the Central Montana RAC.

e) Guidelines for the Citizen Management Committee.--The committee must base its decisions on the best scientific and commercial data available. The committee will meet at least two times a year and its deliberations must be open to the public. The committee must encourage public participation in its decision-making process. The Bureau of Land Management's Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee will recommend to the committee a process by which it should make its decisions. The Bureau of Land Management's Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee also will recommend to the committee a process for resolving any disputes that emerge between the Secretary of the Interior and the committee. This process should balance the Secretary's need to maintain authority to override actions taken by the citizen committee not in compliance with the presidential proclamation or existing federal laws, with the committee's need not to have its authority withdrawn arbitrarily.

e) The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Incentive Fund.--The citizen management committee is authorized to develop a fund, created by receipts from the Missouri River fee demonstration project and from federal appropriations, to share with local landowners and permittees the cost of modifying their operations in ways that promote the naturalness and ecological health of the monument.

f) Citizen Management Committee Recommendation on Oil and Gas and Mineral Leasing and Development. Existing management, while respecting the valid rights of existing lease holders, prohibits future oil and gas or mineral leasing. In 2012, the citizen management committee shall deliver to the Secretary of the Interior its findings regarding the compatibility of oil and gas or mineral development in the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument.

V. Acknowledgments

The following people provided me with information, advice and insight regarding management of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. This listing does not imply endorsement of my proposal by these people.

Mike Aderhold, Regional Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Great Falls, MT

Michael Bean, Director of Wildlife Programs, Environmental Defense, Washington, DC

Jim Burchfield, School of Forestry, University of Montana, Missoula, MT

Susan Bury, Stauffer-Bury Inc., Red Lodge, MT

Dave Dittloff, Conservation Director, Montana Wildlife Federation, Helena, MT

Karen Dunigan, Solicitor for the Department of the Interior, Billings, MT

Larry Finfer, Associate Director, Bureau of Land Management, Washington, DC

Craig Flentie, wildlife biologist, Bureau of Land Management, Lewistown, MT

Tom France, Northern Rockies Director, National Wildlife Federation

Jesse Juen, Director of Cooperative Programs, Bureau of Land Management, Washington, DC

Dan Kemmis, Director of Center for the Rocky Mountain West, Missoula, MT

Dave Mari, Bureau of Land Management, Lewistown, MT

Jim McDermid, member of Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee, Great Falls, MT

Stan Meyer, member of Central Montana Resource Advisory Committee, Great Falls, MT

Robert Nelson, School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Mike Penfold, former Montana State Director, Bureau of Land Management, Billings, MT

Greg Schildwachter, Idaho Office of Species Conservation, Boise, ID

Gary Slagel, Bureau of Land Management, Lewistown, MT

VI. Biographical Sketch: Hank Fischer

Hank Fischer has worked in the Northern Rockies for Defenders of Wildlife for over 24 years. His office is in Missoula, Montana.

He has been intensively involved with endangered species restoration efforts, particularly those involving wolves, grizzly bears and black-footed ferrets. He created and now administers Defenders of Wildlife's Wolf Compensation Trust, which uses private funds to compensate livestock producers for verified losses to wolves (he also created a parallel program for grizzly bears). He helped create the plan that led to the successful restoration of wolves to Yellowstone and central Idaho. That effort was chronicled in his 1995 book, Wolf Wars. Most recently, he has been a leader in a collaborative effort between conservationists, the timber industry and organized labor to restore grizzly bears to central Idaho and western Montana.

Fischer has also been involved in a variety of public land issues. He helped create statewide wildlife viewing systems for Montana and Idaho and is coauthor of the Montana Wildlife Viewing Guide. He was also project director for another important Defenders' publication, Building Economic Incentives Into the Endangered Species Act. More recently he has been a leader in Flathead Common Ground, a collaborative project seeking solutions to forest management problems in northwestern Montana.

Fischer holds a Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana where he studied wildlife biology and journalism. He is an avid fisherman, hunter and outdoorsman and the author of both Montana's definitive river book, The Paddler's Guide to Montana.