



Protecting Southwest Montana’s Gallatin and Madison Ranges



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Wild Montana unites and mobilizes communities to keep Montana wild. Originally called the Montana Wilderness Association, Wild Montana was founded in response to increasing privatization and development in southwest Montana’s wild high country. Over the past 65 years, we’ve expanded our work to every corner of the state and

JEDI Efforts and Impact

At Wild Montana, we firmly believe that justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are essential elements of our work to achieve a future where Montana’s people and wildlife flourish and public lands and waters are wild and connected. Internally, this past year, we engaged in an organizational health assessment with TREC, and as a result,

welcomed tens of thousands of members and supporters from across the country into our movement to protect the public lands and waters that make Montana so special. Our work has resulted in 16 wilderness areas, the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, an oil and gas lease-free Badger-Two Medicine, and other legislative, administrative, and executive victories that have protected millions of acres of public lands from irresponsible development and degradation.

are taking action to improve our culture including providing more opportunities for connection and quarterly training to support staff. Every three years, we work with a third-party to evaluate our compensation practices to ensure that we are providing staff with competitive living wages. Externally, we are dedicated to amplifying the values and priorities of our partners. For example, currently, we are supporting the Crow Tribe's youth engagement efforts to foster a connection to the land and to support the Tribe's priorities and vision for realizing protections for the Crazy Mountains.

Final Success

Permanent protections for 250,000 acres in the Gallatin and Madison mountain ranges in southwest Montana that will protect drinking water, expand access to outdoor recreation, conserve wildlife habitat, and halt further development to forever protect these lands for all of us.

Location Details

The Madison and Gallatin mountain ranges in southwest Montana are located just outside Yellowstone National Park, extending roughly 155 miles across Montana and bordering some of the fastest-growing communities in the state including Bozeman, Big Sky, Livingston, and West Yellowstone.

A long ridge of high snowy peaks flanked by steep drainages, the Gallatin Range is a critical connectivity corridor linking the world's first national park with surrounding wildlands. Home to grizzlies, wolverine, elk, and other critical wildlife species, the Gallatin Range is the largest landscape without permanent protection within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. While the Gallatin and Madison ranges have some protections under the current Forest Service management plan, these protections are not permanent. Decades of conflict have left this landscape vulnerable and without the protection it deserves. Given the rapid growth and change in the Madison-Gallatin region, a politically viable solution that protects this landscape from encroaching development and increasing motorized use is more important now than ever.

The Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) – a coalition of recreationists, business owners, sportsmen, landowners and conservationists who call the Madison and Gallatin ranges home – reached an agreement to protect this landscape. The Greater Yellowstone Conservation and Recreation Act (GYCRA) is proposed legislation that will permanently protect 250,000 acres of public land in the Madison and Gallatin mountain ranges, protect drinking water, provide balanced access to outdoor recreation, conserve wildlife habitat, and stop further development to forever protect these lands for all of us. 1,700 citizens, business owners, and recreation advocates have endorsed the GFP. In 2024, the Gallatin and Madison County Commissions endorsed the GFP and proposed legislation, GYCRA. Further,

Biodiversity in Project Area

GYCRA will protect vital connectivity and wildlife habitat for grizzly bears, elk, osprey, native cutthroat trout, bobcats, bighorn sheep, and more in the Madison and Gallatin mountain ranges. By protecting critical land and water resources, the act will also enhance resiliency to a changing climate.

Here's how:

Wilderness

The act will designate 124,000 acres of new Wilderness in the Madison and Gallatin ranges, described below:

- The act will create the 102,000-acre Gallatin Wilderness Area. The Gallatin Range is a key migratory corridor that allows wildlife to move north from Yellowstone in search of food and refuge.
- The act adds 22,000 acres to the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area. The act will designate 15,000 acres in the area known as Cowboy Heaven, which connects the Spanish Peaks unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and the Bear Trap Canyon Wilderness Area. It will also add nearly 6,400 acres to the Taylor Hilgard Unit.

Permanently Protected Management Areas

In addition to new Wilderness, the act will replace the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area design with the permanent designations described below.

- 31,000 acres of the Gallatin Range will become the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, maintaining access to all trails in this area, and preventing trail expansion, development, mining, and timber harvest to protect wildlife habitat. By preventing new trail construction in this area, this designation will help protect elk, mule deer, moose, and bighorn sheep across key winter habitat.
- 25,000 acres in the northeast Gallatin Range will become the West Pine Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, permanently protecting the area from mining and new roads. The act will also protect this area from logging that necessitates new road building and allow the Forest Service to manage for fire and protect private lands in the frontcountry while maintaining undisturbed wildlife habitat in the backcountry.
- 70,000 acres in Hyalite Canyon and the

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

the proposal has overwhelming statewide support, with 9 in 10 Montanans stating they believe it's important to permanently protect the Madison and Gallatin Ranges, according to a 2023 poll of Montana voters commissioned by the GFP.

In 2023, Montana was ranked #3 in the nation on the contribution of the outdoor recreation economy to the state's total gross domestic product and supported over 30,000 jobs, according to Headwaters Economics's The Outdoor Recreation Economy by State Report. Southwest Montana is a recreation haven for locals and visitors alike, contributing substantially to the statewide recreation economy by maintaining public access and increasing recreation opportunities. GYCRA will protect high-quality hunting, fishing, and recreation access in the Madison and Gallatin mountain ranges, protecting the connections to land and water that enhance quality of life and support southwest Montana's outdoor recreation economy now and for future generations.

Here's how:

- The West Pine Recreation Management Area will ensure continued mountain bike access on all system trails in the West Pine area and provide for the building of two new trails: one that will connect the Dry Divide Trail with the Bear Lakes Trail, and one to link the West Pine Trail with the North Dry Creek Trail. These two-loop trails are designed to create safer opportunities for hikers, bikers, and horsemen while reducing trailhead congestion by eliminating the need for car shuttles.
- The Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wildlife & Recreation Management Area will protect existing dirt bike, snowmobile, and mountain bike access in this area on trails like the Big Sky Snowmobile Trail, Porcupine Creek Trail, and Buffalo Horn Trail.
- The Hyalite Watershed Protection & Recreation Area will maintain the current trail footprint in the most sensitive habitats, while allowing for strategic trail buildout in two front-country areas. One of those front-country areas is in Hyalite Canyon, where the act will allow for new trails so this area can continue to provide enjoyable access to the outdoors, close to home, for nearby communities including Bozeman, Belgrade, and Livingston.

Bozeman Creek and South Cottonwood drainages will become the Hyalite Watershed Protection & Recreation Area, protecting water quality while ensuring access to some of the area's most popular trails. It will also prevent mining, new roads, and building new trails for motorized use. 80% of the city of Bozeman's water comes from the area encompassed by this designation.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Wild Montana is the lead organization building public demand through strategic communications and organizing to advance GYCRA, a proposal to protect the headwaters of the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers, conserve areas for wildlife migration, expand recreation access, and designate nearly 124,000 acres of new wilderness in the Gallatin and Madison ranges endorsed by nearly 2,000 local community members, businesses, and organizations.

To achieve final success, in the next year, Wild Montana will be focused on:

Strategy 1: Engage individuals, tribal agencies, businesses, community and user groups, and organizations across Montana to demonstrate broad, bipartisan backing for GYCRA.

Objectives:

- Through Wild Montana's business engagement and advocacy platform, Business for Montana's Outdoors (BFMO), outreach to key Bozeman, Big Sky, Ennis, and Livingston businesses, with an eye towards creative collaborations to expand business endorsements locally and statewide to include a wider variety of industries and geographies, with the goal of doubling the number of endorsements for the project from 60 to 120.
- Collaborate with BFMO business members and Bozeman-based Oboz Footwear to expand awareness and help with educational events and opportunities to secure further endorsements.
- Conduct outreach to raise awareness, engage, and secure support from influential stakeholders, including local businesses, area outfitters, ranchers, conservation organizations, city commissions, and local decision-makers.
- Leverage partnerships with conservation groups, outdoor retailers, and tourism boards to amplify our message and reach a broader audience.
- Outreach to tribal agencies to ensure the act as written protects treaty rights and traditional uses of the area and ensure their input and endorsement of the proposal prior to introduction.

Strategy 2: Mobilize businesses, recreationists, and community members to demonstrate overwhelming local

Key Decision Makers

We seek to secure support from the Montana congressional delegation to advance the Greater Yellowstone Conservation and Recreation Act. While we seek support from all four delegation members, our focus is on Sen. Daines specifically. As the senior Montana congressional delegation member, it is likely that major legislation such as GYCRA will require some level of buy-in from Sen. Daines even if he isn't the initial sponsor. Further, Sen. Daines' position on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources gives the legislation the best possible opportunity to pass through the committee. Sen. Daines also has a personal connection to the area and has long shared his admiration for the Gallatin Range. Sen. Daines is an hiker, hunter, and the Gallatin and Madison ranges are in his public lands "backyard." In fact, Senator Daines was engaged to his now wife, Cindy, on top of Hyalite Peak years ago.

To gain Sen. Daines's support, we are working to gain endorsement of the proposal from every county commissioner within the proposal landscape. The collaborative currently has the support of the entire Madison and Gallatin County Commissions. We also have letters of endorsement from each commission and are continuing to work with Park County Commissioners to gain their support. These conversations are ongoing. The support of these commissions will go a long way toward solidifying Senator Daines' support for the proposed legislation.

Support from the business community will also be crucial in securing Senator Daines' endorsement. Looking at the GYCRA from an economic lens, we know that protected, accessible public lands are key to Montana's business community, tourism dollars, local jobs, and business development. With an outdoor recreation economy that supports more than 30,000 jobs and is roughly 5% of the state's gross domestic product, it is imperative that the business voice is out front on how the GYCRA will add value and critical support to our state's economy.

demand for urgent action.

Objectives:

- Implement a multi-tiered communications plan to build and demonstrate strong public demand for the proposal.
 - a. Launch targeted online advertising campaigns to reach specific demographics, including local recreational enthusiasts.
 - b. Develop engaging content such as videos, infographics, and blog posts to highlight the importance of the act and encourage action.
 - c. Highlight endorsements from prominent local leaders, outdoor influencers, and businesses in campaign materials and communications.
 - d. Develop earned media events to raise awareness of the issue, allowing key validators (businesses, outdoor rec industry, tourism industry) to carry the message.
 - e. Place guest columns and LTEs written by key validators to raise awareness of the Act and its benefits to all Montanans.
 - f. Develop press releases to amplify key moments in the campaign such as an official launch, announcing partners, announcing groundswell of support, introducing the legislation, etc.
 - g. Maintain the dedicated GYCRA website to provide information about the Act, share updates, and mobilize supporters.
- Provide supporters with tools and resources to advocate for GYCRA, including sample scripts for contacting elected officials and talking points for discussing the issue with friends and neighbors.
- Establish GYCRA visibility and presence at community and business events in the region. Collaborate with local outdoor clubs, conservation groups, and recreational organizations to host events and spread awareness, including Earth Day celebrations, documentary events, trail races, farmers markets, and by hosting educational Wilderness Walks on the lands to be protected through the act.
- Create a business-focused letter of support that will become part of the suite of supporting documents, efforts, and voices that will be leveraged to move GYCRA forward with more than 30 businesses signed on.

Strategy 3: Continue to build positive relationships and maintain regular contact with Montana's delegation to keep them informed about GYCRA, its value, and the local support behind it.

Objectives:

- Develop and deploy a system of regular contact with delegation staff, sharing positive messages and keeping them aware of this proposal.
- Identify a trusted ally who can advise

us on our power map and confirm if we're talking to the right people.

Strategy 4: Lay the groundwork to secure legislative introduction in 2025.

Objectives

- Prepare and deploy influential spokespeople to shape conversations with the delegation to pave the way for the proposal introduction in 2025.

Through these strategies, we will ensure that GYCRA has the strongest possible positioning to achieve success in Congress. As a trusted, longstanding conservation organization, we will leverage our relationships with influential stakeholders, decision-makers, and business leaders, our communication resources, and our strong grassroots network of 90,000 to secure success.

Elevate Voices

This project has been community-led from its inception. In 2016, the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP), a coalition of local business owners, landowners, and organizations of which Wild Montana is a leading member, came together to develop a realistic solution to protect the public land and waters in this fast-growing corner of Montana. Since then, nearly 2,000 citizens, business owners, and recreation advocates have endorsed the GFP's vision. When the Gallatin Forest Partnership unveiled GYCRA in 2024, the Gallatin and Madison County Commissions were both quick to endorse the act. This past year, we led Wilderness Walks wherein we directly connected people to the lands that would be protected by the proposal, and hosted Backyard Bashes in Bozeman, Big Sky, and Livingston through which we educated hundreds of community members about the proposal and its significance. In addition, we facilitated the submission of dozens of letters to the editors and op-eds supporting the proposal that were published in newspapers across Montana this year, building public demand for the project. Grassroots actions remain a core tactic in our strategy.

The Madison and Gallatin ranges, and the surrounding landscape, include the homelands of dozens of Tribal nations. Throughout the development of this proposal, the GFP has worked with the tribes above to ensure treaty rights and areas of tribal importance are appropriately protected. The GFP is currently working with a tribal consultant to gain endorsement from Tribal Business Councils and the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council.

TCA Funding Plan

Wild Montana is a leading organization building public demand by spearheading organizing and strategic communications

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. 3,500 individuals from Montana have endorsed GYCRA and we have mobilized 2,000 actions (e.g. calls or emails) to Montana delegation members asking them to support the act.
2. 120 businesses locally and statewide have endorsed GYCRA and we have delivered a letter of support to Montana delegation members signed by 30 influential businesses.
3. Secured support and endorsement of GYCRA from influential stakeholders:
 - Endorsement from the Park, Madison, and Gallatin County Commissions and each commissioner from those counties
 - Endorsements from 5 additional ranching operations
 - Endorsements from 5 additional outfitting operations
 - Endorsements from 8 additional elected officials from the landscape area
4. Senator Daines' staff have attended an on-the-ground briefing with collaboration members.

How long it took to complete application

to advance GYCRA. Wild Montana will leverage funding from The Conservation Alliance to support staff time, travel, communications, and meeting expenses to facilitate collaboration between decision-makers, local stakeholders, and business owners; educate the public and other stakeholders, garner media coverage; and mobilize broad community support and demand to advance the proposal.

Confidential Items

**Other Relevant
Application Details**

