

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3527

To release from wilderness study area designation certain land in the State of Montana, to improve the management of that land, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Mr. DAINES (for himself and Mr. SHEEHY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

A BILL

To release from wilderness study area designation certain land in the State of Montana, to improve the management of that land, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Montana Sportsmen
5 Conservation Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds that—

8 (1) under the Montana Wilderness Study Act of
9 1977 (Public Law 95–150; 91 Stat. 1243), 9 wilder-

1 ness study areas comprising a total of 973,000 acres
2 of land in the State of Montana were set aside for
3 the Secretary of Agriculture to evaluate the suit-
4 ability of the wilderness study areas for designation
5 as wilderness, in accordance with the Wilderness Act
6 (16 U.S.C. 1131 et seq.), with the evaluation to be
7 completed not later than 5 years after the date of
8 enactment of the Montana Wilderness Study Act of
9 1977 (Public Law 95–150; 91 Stat. 1243);

10 (2) between 1979 and 1986, the Chief of the
11 Forest Service—

12 (A) completed the studies of the 9 wilder-
13 ness study areas referred to in paragraph (1);
14 and

15 (B) based on those studies, determined
16 that 608,700 acres of the original 973,000
17 acres designated as wilderness study areas by
18 the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977
19 (Public Law 95–150; 91 Stat. 1243) were un-
20 suitable for inclusion in the National Wilder-
21 ness Preservation System, including the 81,000
22 acres within the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness
23 Study Area;

24 (3) in 2021, following a 6-year collaborative
25 process, the Forest Service again determined, in the

1 revision of the Helena Lewis and Clark National
2 Forest plan, that the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness
3 Study Area is unsuitable for inclusion in the Na-
4 tional Wilderness Preservation System;

5 (4) under the Federal Land Policy and Man-
6 agement Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.), 38
7 wilderness study areas comprising a total of 447,327
8 acres of land in the State of Montana were set aside
9 by the Bureau of Land Management to evaluate the
10 suitability of the wilderness study areas for designa-
11 tion as wilderness, with the evaluation to be com-
12 pleted not later than 15 years after the date of en-
13 actment of that Act;

14 (5) in 1991, the Director of the Bureau of
15 Land Management submitted to the President a rec-
16 ommendation on the suitability for designation of
17 the areas described in paragraph (4), which was sub-
18 sequently submitted to Congress, under which the
19 Director of the Bureau of Land Management deter-
20 mined that 273,828 acres in the State of Montana
21 designated as wilderness study areas by the Federal
22 Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43
23 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) were unsuitable for wilderness
24 designation, including—

1 (A) the 11,380 acres of land within the
2 Hoodoo Mountain Wilderness Study Area; and

3 (B) the 11,580 acres of land within the
4 Wales Creek Wilderness Study Area;

5 (6) in 2020, following a 5-year collaborative
6 process, the Bureau of Land Management, in the re-
7 vision of the Missoula Resource Management Plan—

8 (A) reaffirmed that the Hoodoo Mountain
9 Wilderness Study Area and the Wales Creek
10 Wilderness Study Area were unsuitable for wil-
11 derness designation; and

12 (B) recommended alternative management
13 parameters for the Hoodoo Mountain Wilder-
14 ness Study Area and the Wales Creek Wilder-
15 ness Study Area;

16 (7) despite the recommendations of the Forest
17 Service and the Bureau of Land Management, after
18 the completion of the studies for suitability of the
19 land in the State of Montana designated as wilder-
20 ness study areas under the Montana Wilderness
21 Study Act of 1977 (Public Law 95–150; 91 Stat.
22 1243) and the Federal Land Policy and Manage-
23 ment Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.)—

1 (A) over 1,100,000 acres of public land in
2 the State of Montana remain as wilderness
3 study areas until Congress acts; and

4 (B) over 700,000 acres of public land in
5 the State of Montana currently designated as
6 wilderness study areas have been determined
7 unsuitable for wilderness management;

8 (8) if the wilderness study area designation was
9 removed from each of the Middle Fork Judith Wil-
10 derness Study Area, the Hoodoo Mountain Wilder-
11 ness Study Area, and the Wales Creek Wilderness
12 Study Area, land managers would be able to better
13 conserve and manage the areas in accordance with
14 applicable land and resource management plans that
15 retain certain protections for the areas, while pro-
16 viding for—

17 (A) enhanced sportsmen opportunities in
18 the backcountry of Montana;

19 (B) improved public access; and

20 (C) the conduct of wildlife habitat and
21 wildfire mitigation projects;

22 (9) the applicable land and resource manage-
23 ment plans referred to in paragraph (8) were devel-
24 oped through a multi-year, collaborative process sup-
25 ported by—

1 (A) resource needs and conditions; and

2 (B) the best available science; and

3 (10) following release, the respective land man-
4 agement agencies shall continue managing the areas
5 described in paragraph (8)—

6 (A) in accordance with applicable environ-
7 mental and administrative laws; and

8 (B) based on local input, multiple-use and
9 sustained yield principles, and land manage-
10 ment objectives.

11 **SEC. 3. RELEASE AND IMPROVED MANAGEMENT OF LAND**
12 **COMPRISING CERTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY**
13 **AREAS.**

14 (a) MIDDLE FORK JUDITH WILDERNESS STUDY
15 AREA.—The approximately 81,000 acres of land com-
16 prising the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area—

17 (1) shall no longer be subject to section 3(a) of
18 the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 (Public
19 Law 95–150; 91 Stat. 1244); and

20 (2) shall be managed in accordance with the ap-
21 plicable land and resource management plan most
22 recently adopted under section 6 of the Forest and
23 Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of
24 1974 (16 U.S.C. 1604).

1 (b) HOODOO MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
2 AND WALES CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA.—The ap-
3 proximately 11,380 acres of land comprising the Hoodoo
4 Mountain Wilderness Study Area and the approximately
5 11,580 acres of land comprising the Wales Creek Wilder-
6 ness Study Area—

7 (1) shall no longer be subject to section 603(c)
8 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of
9 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1782(c)); and

10 (2) shall be managed in accordance with the ap-
11 plicable land management plans adopted under sec-
12 tion 202 of that Act (43 U.S.C. 1712).

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