

NEW WILDLIFE STUDY

Reveals Importance of Limestone Creek Area for Habitat Security

By Jeff Yates and Anna Allen, local contributors

A professional biologist's study of the Limestone Creek area of the Gallatin Front south of Bozeman documented that the area provides high-quality habitat for wildlife including wolverines, pine martens, red foxes, mountain lions, bobcats, moose and elk, underscoring the threat posed to sensitive wildlife by a state agency's plan for extensive logging in this area.

The study, undertaken last winter by Steve Gehman of Wild Things Unlimited on behalf of Save Our Gallatin Front, found that the area provides "a high level of habitat security for wildlife" and concluded that "the Limestone and Nichols Creek drainages are the only significant drainages on the eastern portion (i.e., east of Hyalite Creek) of the Gallatin Face that do not contain roads, easy public access, and high levels of human activity."

Save Our Gallatin Front, a coalition of Bozeman and Gallatin County citizens that was formed in response to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's (DNRC) proposed Limestone West logging project, commissioned Gehman's wildlife study based on concern that the DNRC's planned logging and road building would have long term negative impacts on this critical wildlife habitat in the Limestone Creek area. *We hope to raise community awareness about the implications of this proposed logging on wildlife, the solitude of the area, and the overall beauty of our valley. The coalition also seeks to cooperate with the DNRC in an effort to come up with a reasonable alternative to logging in this area.*

The DNRC's proposed Limestone West timber sale calls for logging on about 560 acres in the Gallatin front in the area surrounding the Triple Tree trail and to the east toward Mt. Ellis along Limestone Creek. Stands of lodge pole pine, the predominant tree type in the forest, would be clear cut and Douglas fir trees, many of which are over 100 years old, would be "thinned." About 10 miles of new roads would be built into this currently roadless drainage and approximately 5 miles of these roads would remain open after logging, including the planned roads alongside of Limestone Creek.

This Limestone Creek area is the last remaining roadless forest area close to Bozeman and constitutes the northernmost extension of a tract of roadless land stretching from the Gallatin Range south of Bozeman through the Gallatin National Forest all the way to Yellowstone National Park.

Gehman's conclusions track very closely to a May 1983 Bear Canyon Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the Department of State Lands (DSL). The DSL found then that "Limestone Creek is virtually pristine" and "the undisturbed nature of this 956-acre zone is complemented by impressive scenery and an abundance of wildlife, including deer, elk, moose and golden eagle." The DSL concluded that "this combination of conditions has provided excellent wildlife habitat" and

"the severe topographic and soil conditions ["unstable soils" and "boggy conditions"] present in the Limestone Creek drainage will continue to prevent development of the timber resource."

"The new wildlife study demonstrates that the Limestone Creek drainage is just as undisturbed and abundant with wildlife as it was in 1983 when the state found it was not appropriate for logging," Tim Tousignant, co-chair of the Save Our Gallatin Front, sums up.

The complete wildlife study, a link to the 1983 Bear Canyon Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement and information on upcoming public hikes in the Limestone West area can be obtained at www.saveourgallatinfront.org.



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