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**Gallatin Valley Citizens Challenge Terms of Timber Sale to Log  
Last Wild Connection from Bozeman to Yellowstone**

*Lawsuit Targets Unfair Deal that Gave Timber Companies  
an Advantage over Local Conservationists in Limestone West Timber Sale*

Bozeman, MT – A group of Gallatin Valley citizens is challenging the State of Montana’s approval of the Limestone West Timber Sale Project, which would carve nearly 7 miles of new roads and log 448 acres in the last undeveloped valley in the Gallatin Range foothills south of Bozeman.

In a lawsuit filed late yesterday, Save Our Gallatin Front, represented by Earthjustice, challenges the state’s treatment of a timber sale alternative that would permit local citizens to bid against timber companies for the right to protect the Limestone Creek valley from logging. Under a decision finalized by the Montana Board of Land Commissioners and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation on January 22, the state would require local citizens to pay an unfair fee to obtain a conservation license.

“Gallatin Valley citizens deserve a fair opportunity to preserve Bozeman’s last wild connection to Yellowstone,” said **Tim Tousignant of Save Our Gallatin Front**. “The Limestone Creek valley is the last tract of roadless land extending from the edge of the Gallatin Valley into the high country of the Gallatin Range. From this landscape southward an unbroken tract of roadless country stretches all the way to Yellowstone National Park. As such, Limestone offers key wildlife habitat and an important connection to the wild beginning in Bozeman’s backyard.”

**STATE CREATED UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD IN TIMBER SALE**

During the planning process for the Limestone West timber sale, Save Our Gallatin Front applied to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation for a conservation license, which would restrict development of the Limestone Creek area for a specified period. The agency ultimately agreed to offer Save Our Gallatin Front an opportunity to bid against logging companies for a 25-year conservation license to protect the Limestone area, but set unfair terms for that license.

To win a conservation license for the Limestone West Timber Sale project area, the Department is requiring Save Our Gallatin Front to pay the entire stumpage value of the trees involved in the sale. That’s the same value that a timber company must pay to log the trees — even though the trees would

remain standing to be sold and logged in the future if a conservation license is issued. The agency is requiring Save Our Gallatin Front to pay this full stumpage value for a conservation license lasting only 25 years, even though it would take 90 to 100 years for the forest to grow back if it were logged instead of conserved.

This approach to the conservation license alternative would enable the state to sell the same trees twice, each time for a payment of full stumpage value, over a period of 25 years, and would require Save Our Gallatin Front to pay 100 percent of the timber value for 25 percent of the lifespan of the timber resource.

“The state’s approach to auctioning a conservation license for the important Limestone Creek valley is not fair and it is not what the law requires,” said **Earthjustice attorney Tim Preso**. “We intend to ask a judge to ensure that there is a level playing field for local citizens in the Limestone West timber sale auction.”

### **THE LAST WILD CONNECTION BETWEEN BOZEMAN AND YELLOWSTONE**

The roadless Limestone Creek area is the last undeveloped foothill valley in the Gallatin Range south of Bozeman. Because of its undisturbed nature, the valley offers extraordinary wildlife habitat for species including moose, elk, and pine martens that have been displaced from other, more heavily traveled foothills. In 1980, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation prepared a draft management plan for the Limestone valley that described the area as “unique” because it is “virtually pristine and receives light use” and offers “impressive scenery and an abundance of wildlife, including moose and bald eagle.”

But in 2016, the agency announced plans to build roads and conduct logging in the Limestone Creek area, prompting local citizens to form the group Save Our Gallatin Front to oppose this development. During the planning process for the state’s Limestone West timber sale project, Save Our Gallatin Front formally applied for a conservation license, which is defined by state law as “a temporary agreement restricting the harvest of timber on a state timber sale but not prohibiting other forms of use and management of the land and timber by the state.”

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