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SPOTLIGHT

Daines visits Bear Canyon timber sale area

By Michael Wright Chronicle Staff Writer Jul 18, 2015

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Glenn Marx, center left, with the Montana Association of Land Trusts, briefs Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., and members of the community on land management practices during a tour of a forest management project south of Bozeman on Friday.

Standing in short grass outside of the Fort Ellis Fire Station, Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Daines

stared at a mountain.

The mountain was the site of the Bear Canyon timber sale, a Department of Natural Resources and Conservation project on about 750 acres of school trust land that sent about 6.2 million board feet to RY Timber's Livingston sawmill.

Daines turned to Ed Regan, the resource manager for RY, and noted that there are only a handful of sawmills left open today.

"We've thought about adding some of these sawmills to the Endangered Species List because you guys are dying," Daines joked, slapping Regan on the back.

Daines was visiting the area as part of Montana Open Land Month, an idea that stemmed from the Montana Association of Land Trusts.

Glenn Marx, the executive director of that organization, said the group has helped organize a number of events throughout the month to celebrate what open lands do for Montanans.

"I like to say that open land feeds our bellies, feeds our pocketbooks and feeds our souls," Marx said.

In this case, the Bear Canyon timber sale fed the pocketbooks of schools and loggers, but not without sparking some debate over its benefits.

DNRC proposed the sale in 2010, raising hairs on the necks of locals who worried their mountain views would be impacted. But those concerns didn't stop the sale, which began in 2011 and finished about a year ago.

The clear cuts are visible on the mountain, but so are young lodgepole pines that are already sprouting up in the area.

Trust lands have to be managed for profitability. That means the state has to look for the best way to make revenue off the land. The sale earned about \$740,000 for schools, according to DNRC.

A timber sale made sense to them because it would do that and reduce fuels for wildfire in the

process. Sonya Germann, the DNRC trust land division forest management bureau chief, said a lot of the trees in the area had suffered from beetle kill.

“What we found here is that we were having significant mortality,” Germann said.

Germann also credited the local DNRC staff with shoring up public support for the sale and getting it to run smoothly.

DNRC timber sales have been more successful for loggers than Forest Service sales in part because fewer lawsuits come about over state timber sales.

Steve Kelly, of Alliance for the Wild Rockies, said that’s in part because Montana’s laws favor logging over environmental concerns.

Either way, that has led to trust lands being a more consistent source for timber in Montana.

Germann said that in the state DNRC owns “less than 5 percent of commercial forested acres, but we account for 15 to 20 percent of the timber that is harvested.”

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