

https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/opinions/guest_columnists/the-case-against-commercial-logging-of-limestone-west/article_34dcf1f2-4899-55d9-bd1a-daac93c50440.html

The case against commercial logging of Limestone West

By Noreen Breeding Guest columnist Sep 7, 2018

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is planning to log the hills and valleys west of Mt. Ellis on the southeast edge of Bozeman. An environmental impact statement for the project was recently released for public comment.

The declared and undeclared objectives of the project are to: maximize revenue for the trust; prevent wildfires now and in the future; provide jobs for loggers to please politicians; and “manage” the forest. However, much better outcomes for the forest, wildlife, the trust, and Bozeman residents can be achieved by modifying the proposed project.

At statehood in 1889, Montana was given randomly selected sections of land by the federal government to use to “support” schools and “other worthy objects.” They are called trust lands. Limestone West is the area of trust land west of Mt. Ellis. It is classified for timber harvest despite the steepness of the terrain and unsuitability of the soils for logging and road building and regardless of its value to the local community for wildlife, scenery, water supply and solitude.

The revenue going to trust beneficiaries from this project will be paltry based on the example of the 2013 logging project east of Mt. Ellis. Expending natural resources may have been a reasonable practice in 1889, but in 2018 there are more profitable and consistent ways to raise money for schools. The revenue from this project will actually provide very little funds for schools as the overwhelming majority is

designated for support of “public buildings.”

The Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks regards this project as very harmful to wildlife because Limestone Creek area is unique in retaining the abundant wildlife and habitat that all the other forest watersheds near Bozeman have lost to development.

Roads and clear cuts are the biggest threats to the Limestone Creek area. They promote human intrusion that would cause wildlife to abandon prime habitat. Logging activities also spread noxious weeds and erode sediment into streams and dry out the land due to lack of vegetative cover. Removal of the forest will likely change the drainage regime to the point where the now perennial creeks will dry up.

Arguments used by politicians to support logging, such as preventing fires or creating jobs, do not bear up under scrutiny. Building permanent roads for one cutting every 100 years makes no sense. The argument for having road access for firefighting on cut over land is illogical. Leaving roads open for weed control is ironic as there are few weeds now and only road building will cause them to spread.

This project may create a few temporary part-time jobs for loggers. No more logging would be needed until the trees grow back to cutting size in 100 years. Why are politicians talking about logging jobs when unemployment levels are at record lows and well-trained workers are in short supply?

Montana law recognizes the intrinsic value of wild lands by establishing a system of natural areas to preserve “natural ecosystem integrity in perpetuity.” Trust lands qualify as natural areas and designating them as such fulfills the trust obligation. In 1983 the Department of State Lands (DSL) recommended Limestone Creek area be a formal Natural Area. However, DNRC and the State Land Board have never developed procedures or regulations to implement a natural area system.

The answer to the dilemma of Limestone West is “natural area” designation rather than logging. Since no formal mechanism exists to generate trust revenue for a natural area, citizens need to be given a chance to raise funds for it as the DSL recommended in 1983.

Noreen Breeding, of Bozeman, is a member of Save Our Gallatin Front, a group of local citizens who joined together in 2016 to protect the wildlife and creeks of the Limestone watershed.

DON'T MISS THESE LETTERS

**Montana, U.S. Senate
both lucky to have Jon
Tester**

**Public safety bond will
help keep Bozeman
safe**

**Higher ed levy will
help keep college
accessible**

**Flowers will look for
solutions for all
Montanans**