

**TESTIMONY**  
**Before the Lewis & Clark County Commission**  
**Regarding the Continental Divide Wildlife Corridor**  
**June 5, 2008**

Members of the Commission and Staff. My name is Gayle Joslin. I am a Helena native. I recently retired from state government after 33 years as a wildlife biologist. I was the Helena area wildlife biologist for MFWP for 22 years.

I am a member of the Helena Hunters and Anglers Association who initiated this effort to come before you today. Several other groups and citizens are also represented here as well. We all wish to ensure that the vibrant wild country that defines the geography of Lewis and Clark County endures. We are all wearing a statement that says **“Take Pride in a Wild Divide.”** We don’t want to see the Continental Divide further encumbered with developments. We DO wish to pass a Wild Divide proudly forward to future generations.

The people before you today represent some of the many who wish to declare their dedication, their allegiance, and passion for our wild landscapes. Many of us are hunters, some of us planners, all of us are devotees of the Continental Divide and the many roles it plays in our lives and the lives of wildlife.

Wildlife is the single most important amenity that defines Montana in the minds of fellow Americans. This fact has been clearly identified by the Montana Challenge Project. When folks from Connecticut to California think of Montana, they think of wildlife: elk, moose, grizzly bears, wolves, wolverine, lynx – all creatures that rely upon unencumbered country for life-cycle needs, to live in and to move through. It all happens along the Divide just to our west.

Where the tapestry of wild country has been worn and frayed to mere threads, those threads become crucial, serving as fragile links between islands of habitat that would otherwise become isolated and unavailable. Isolated, unavailable country equates to attrition and diminished habitat for wildlife. And Montana itself becomes diminished.

MacDonald Pass constitutes one of those tenuous vital threads connecting larger public land habitats to the north and south. We are anxious that this fragile thread of wildlife continuity not be further worn or irretrievably broken.

We have the opportunity to prevent that. We even have the chance to restore country to functional working landscapes for wildlife. Indeed, Montana is leading the nation in just such an endeavor through the thousands of acres of land that are going into conservation easements. Lewis & Clark County is leading Montana in efforts to maintain and enhance open space and wildlife habitat in projects such as:

- the Sieben, O'Connell, and Grady conservation easements,
- the Lincoln-Scapegoat Wilderness (the first citizen lead wilderness designation in the nation)
- and government efforts such as the Sun River and Beartooth Wildlife Management Areas.

Recognizing and conserving our Continental Divide Wildlife Corridor would be as important a mile-stone as each of those achievements.

Some of us are members of the MacDonald Pass Working Group which formed a few years ago to help define the future of our landscapes and promote an understanding of wildlife corridors and their importance throughout Montana.

The maps we bring today show some of our efforts to collect and provide information to planners so they have as much information as possible to make informed recommendations.

- The small map depicts radio-collared elk that I marked while with Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the vicinity of the Continental Divide 20 years ago.
- The large map displays our citizen effort to compile the knowledge of local residents regarding movements of wildlife through this landscape.
- This map is the result of wildlife track surveys over the last two winters. Eleven different species have been documented – specifically, track locations of the threatened Canada Lynx are shown here as well as bobcat, and wolverine.

Until we, as citizens, undertook this task to quantify the variety of wildlife use on the MacDonald Pass segment of the Continental Divide, no other comprehensive effort to do so had been attempted.

We are here as a testimonial to the importance of the Continental Divide in the geography of our lives and the lives of the wildlife that make Montana such a treasure.

We are all proud and very appreciative of the Lewis & Clark County Commission's past and present leadership on behalf of wild lands and functional landscapes. So, today we ask you to endorse the resolution before you, and to please use your authority and influence to preserve these values so that we can all continue to "TAKE PRIDE IN A WILD DIVIDE."

Thank you for your consideration.