

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 8, 2023

Martha Williams
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike,
Falls Church, VA 22041

Dear Director Williams,

It has come to my attention that the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in consultation with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Nature Conservancy and potentially others have taken unprecedented and covert steps to substantially limit public and private use of 5.8 million acres in Montana under the guise of “conservation.” We are aware that the Fish and Wildlife Service, either with or in consultation with private and NGO partners have been in contact with publicly elected officials in Silver Bow, Deer Lodge, Beaverhead, and Madison Counties to gain local and county support for establishing a “Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area” (MHCA) without any input from the broader constituency residing in those areas. This has been going on for several months, if not longer, with no public notice or available information on the USFWS website, despite the USFWS name and logo being prominent on the map of this MHCA. With that in mind, I demand answers to the following questions:

Specifically:

- How long has this conservation land grab been under consideration with the USFWS?
- What outside groups and actors have the USFWS been in contact with regarding the MHCA?
- Why is no information available about the MHCA on the USFWS website or anywhere else in the public domain?
- 5.8 million acres would result in the second largest conservation area ever proposed nationwide; Why this specific area, and why so much acreage?
- What tangible benefits will be seen through the conservation of this area? What benefits would be attained through the potential acquisition of so much land that would not be realized with fewer acres?
- What impacts would this designation have on the public’s use (e.g., timber harvest, grazing, mineral exploration and development, motorized vehicle use/recreation) of its lands in the proposed area and how will this affect adjacent private landowners’ ability to use or develop their land?
- What elected officials have been consulted for this project?
- Have there been any public or private meetings related to this project that the USFWS has been involved in?
 - If so, can you provide us a list of who was at said meeting, who was invited to said meeting, and the notes and/or minutes from said meeting?
 - Please provide a written statement as to why these meetings or hearings have yet to be open to the public.

This is a topic that significantly affects my constituents and the state. Having one of the largest proposed conservation areas in the nation's history go on without any public comment or even being known to anyone outside the group plotting this land grab is a disservice to the country and Montanans. I hope to receive clear, honest answers regarding this critical issue by September 18, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt M. Rosendale, Sr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress