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County Commission Endorses Lincoln Valley Public Lands Proposal

By [Roger Dey](#)
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Roger Dey

An aerial view of the Lincoln Valley looking northwest from the Mike Horse area encompass just a portion of the landscape covered by the Lincoln Valley Public Lands Proposal

The Lincoln Valley Public Lands Proposal took a step forward last week as the Lewis and Clark County Commission unanimously approved a resolution in support of the plan at their regular Dec. 5 meeting in Helena.

Commission Chairman Jim McCormick applauded the community involvement in the proposal as he announced the board's action during the Dec. 6 Lincoln Government Day Meeting at the Lincoln Library.

"The group of folks have been working for years to bring the whole Lincoln community into that discussion; it was collaborative across the board," McCormick said. "The big picture consideration here is that it's local. These are folks who are involved in

forest management issues locally."

The Upper Blackfoot Working Group unveiled the proposal during a meeting in May that was the culmination of several years of planning, compromise and one-on-one discussion with stakeholders aimed at balancing concerns about conservation, recreation and traditional uses of the landscape that extends from the Scapegoat Wilderness boundary south through the Nevada Mountain area.

The proposal, which Working Group members hope to see enacted through federal legislation, is designed to improve forest management, create more recreational opportunities and protect sensitive landscapes on federal land surrounding Lincoln.

McCormick was the last of the three commissioners to come around to supporting the proposal amid concerns about the additional wilderness it included. If enacted, the proposal would create a new wilderness area around Nevada Mountain and add acreage to the Scapegoat, but it was the community involvement in proposing the boundaries of those additions that won him over.

"When its local and its diverse and it's collaborative, that's the right way to do business. It took me a while to get there. I was invited to a meeting and learned a lot, and the other commissioners, in discussions, agreed this is the right thing to do because it's Lincoln and its local," he said. "In this case, there was give and take on the wilderness footprint, so the wilderness folks are getting some of what they want, the Lincoln working group is getting something of what they want. It's good for motorized, it's good for non-motorized, its good for fuels management, wilderness and it all comes together and makes a lot of sense."

The resolution approved by the commission cites community members' desire to see "recreation, conservation, timber, mining and other interests working together to improve national forest management" in the Lincoln area, recognizes the proposal's goals of improving both the forest and the economic conditions of the valley, and notes the diverse coalition of interests included in its development. The resolution calls the Lincoln Valley Public Lands Proposal a "true made-in-Montana solution to public land management."

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In addition to approving the resolution, the commissioners sent a letter to Senators Steve Daines and Jon Tester and Representative Greg Gianforte, urging them to work together to enact the proposal through federal legislation.

Although he wasn't among the Working Group members on hand at Thursday's Commission meeting in Helena, Zach Muse called the formal support from the county a huge step on the path toward seeing the proposal advance to the federal level.

"When you get a whole county commission on board, you've got a government organization saying, 'we support you,'" he said. "You've got two Republicans and a Democrat...so it says a lot."

Muse, a long-standing member of the Working Group who has been deeply involved in crafting the proposal, said they don't foresee much of an issue with it gaining support at the state level. He said during their next meeting the group will discuss engaging with then Governor Steve Bullock's office. They also expect a visit from the new representative from Daines' office.

While no modifications have been made to the proposal since it was presented to the community, Muse said they are looking at some modification around the edges of the proposed Nevada Mountain Wilderness, to create a better buffer between the wilderness and the private land that surrounds it.



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An aerial view of the Lincoln Valley looking west encompass just a portion of the landscape covered by the Lincoln Valley Public Lands Proposal



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Blackfoot Valley Dispatch

P.O. Box 427
Lincoln, MT 59639
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