

## **How to write an effective letter to the editor**

We use letters to the editor (LTEs) to sway opinion, rally others on behalf of our causes, show our appreciation, and hold our elected officials and other decision-makers accountable.

LTEs usually land in the 200- to 300-word range.

At MWA, we often use LTEs to demonstrate public support for whatever we're trying to achieve, be it passing the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, promoting the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, keeping the Antiquities Act intact, and making sure our elected officials generally vote in a way that supports our wild places and public lands.

For your letter to the editor to be effective, it should express three things:

1. Values
2. Threat
3. Solution

### **Values**

In the realm of conservation, values can include clean water, clean air, healthy populations of wildlife, healthy forests, healthy outdoor recreation economies, and so on. Values are what bind us, make us care, and motivate us to act.

### **Threat**

These are the potential actions that jeopardize what we value. Some of the threats we face in the conservation world currently include oil and gas development on intact prairie grasslands in central Montana, oil and gas development in the Badger-Two Medicine, and motorized use in the Great Burn.

### **Solutions**

Solutions are how we respond to the threats. That can include contacting your elected official and telling them to vote one way or another on a bill. It can include contacting the Forest Service or BLM and telling the agency to recommend wilderness protection.

### **Optional, but recommended**

- Start your letter off with a very brief personal anecdote. For instance, write about the grizzly bear you saw on a hike to Grizzly Basin, the enormous bull trout you saw swimming in the North Fork of the Blackfoot, the wonderful time you had hiking with your children along the Swan Range Front. This will make your LTE much more relatable to your readers.

- Appeal to emotions. In Montana, that also means talking about the uniqueness of the state and keeping the state the way it is for our children and grandchildren.

### **LTE sample**

Two weeks ago, I took my 13-year daughter on her first backpacking trip. Our destination was Grizzly Basin in the Swan Mountains east of Seeley Lake. We discovered just how apt the name of this basin is. As we crested the Swan Range and looked down on Grizzly Basin, we saw a grizzly bear. We spent a thrilling hour watching the grizzly tipping over rocks in search of food.

Grizzly Basin sits on the border of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. It was inexplicably left out of the wilderness area when it was designated in 1964. This means that this place, as wild as any in the Bob, could one day be developed.

The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA) , introduced by Senator Tester, would rectify the mistake of leaving Grizzly Basin out of the Bob Marshall. It would add it, and the entire Swan Range Front, to the Bob. It would also add Monture Creek and the North Fork of the Blackfoot to the Scapegoat Wilderness and add the West Fork of the Clearwater to the Mission Mountains Wilderness. In total, the BCSA would add 80,000 acres to these three wilderness areas, permanently protecting the ecologically rich areas for our children and for grizzlies, elk, bull trout, and other species that represent the unique wildness of Montana.

Call Sen. Daines at 202-224-2651 and Congressman Gianforte at 202-225-3211 today and tell them to join with Senator Tester in support of the BCSA.