

Senator Tester's Legacy: A Champion for Outdoor Recreation and Public Lands Stewardship

As we reflect on the service of our senior U.S. Senator Jon Tester, we don't have to look far to see the positive impacts the self-described "seven-fingered dirt farmer" made on our public lands, conservation, and the outdoor recreation opportunities that make Montana so special.

Since he was first elected to Congress, Jon set a high bar fighting for our public lands and Montana's outdoor economy. As a lifelong Montanan with deep roots in agriculture, he understood the delicate balance between land use and conservation. He worked tirelessly to protect both Montana's outdoor way of life as well as the \$7 billion in economic activity and the 71,000 jobs our outdoor recreation industry supports.

In 2013, Jon worked with conservationists, ranchers, and recreationists to pass the first collaborative wilderness bill in three decades — the *Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act*, which protects the North Fork of the Flathead River from oil and gas development.

In 2019, Jon fought to permanently reauthorize and fully fund the *Land and Water Conservation Fund* (LWCF). LWCF invests in Montana by funding everything from swimming pools to soccer fields to large landscape conservation projects — providing access to public outdoor spaces in every single county in Montana.

Jon pushed his bipartisan *Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act*, to protect the doorstep of the nation's first National Park and 30,000 acres of public land from industrial mining.

In 2021 and 2022, Jon was the only member of Montana's Congressional delegation to vote for the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (a.k.a. the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) and the *Inflation Reduction Act*. Thanks to Jon's hard work and advocacy, these new laws fund investments in Montana for wildfire mitigation and critical water infrastructure such as the Milk River Project.

As a farmer and as a teacher, Jon's approach in the United States Senate was to work incredibly hard and to understand, teach, and fight for what is right. Montana is so much better for it. Collectively, we (and generations to come) owe Jon a huge debt of gratitude for his service and we wish him and his wife Sharla our very best in their next chapter.

Sally Ericsson is board chair of the Montana Conservation Voters and lives in Whitefish.