

Great piece in the Missoulian today. HR 1581 co-sponsored by our Congressmen, Dennis Rehberg, would remove roadless protections throughout the Rocky Mountain Front. It does demand some accountability.

Missoulian

Need accountability for attacks on sporting heritage

Guest column by TONY BYNUM | Posted: Thursday, September 22, 2011 8:10 am

Quiz time: What's the most popular place in the world to hunt trophy bighorn sheep? Give yourself a pat on the back if you were thinking of Montana's Missouri River Breaks National Monument? If you didn't get the answer, don't worry, you're about to learn something else? The coulees and canyon lands of the Breaks Monument will still be a huge sporting destination 100 years from now because its world-class habitat and our hunting traditions were protected by proclamation a decade ago? Hunting Breaks country is a big deal, which I can attest too as both a hunter and commercial photographer who's always on the lookout for the best hunting and wild game photographs in Montana? Last year alone sportsmen spent over 20,000 days in search of trophy elk, deer and bighorn sheep in this popular "bread and butter" hunting destination? But not everyone is as proud of our Breaks as the pickup loads of sportsmen who are beginning to make their annual migration to central Montana from all corners of our state, and nation? Rep? Denny Rehberg recently took the podium in Congress to demonize monuments like the Breaks in an attempt to gut the Antiquities Act and make it harder for Montanans to pass along our hunting heritage? After scaring people for more than a year with the threat of a phantom monument, he's now trying to reap what he's sown? It's decisions like these that have caused many folks in the sporting community to wonder who has the ear of our congressman? Whoever it is, I don't think it's public lands hunters because the evidence is pretty clear his voting record hasn't favored our pastime? Recall, it wasn't too long ago that Rehberg voted alongside Rep? Richard Pombo, R-Calif?, on a 2005 bill that would have sold our public lands and prime elk habitat to developers of casinos, ski resorts and condos for rock-bottom prices? It was the largest public lands scam in recent history? Now this year, Rehberg has supported another California lawmaker's legislation to immediately axe roadless protections throughout Montana and the nation - from the limestone reefs of the Rocky

Mountain Front to the deep larch and cedar forests of the Yaak? It's one-size-fits-all legislation and it's causing a huge uproar among hunters? For good reason? Montana has one of the longest hunting seasons in the country because of the habitat security that roadless public lands provide for elk, mule deer and other big game? If you lose your roadless security you've just lost the headwaters of your hunting opportunity? It's happened before in other states? In defending his record, we've often heard Rehberg say he is protecting Montanans from bureaucrats in Washington? It's a good talking point but it ignores that both the Missouri River Breaks designation and the original roadless process were both transparent and open public processes which Montanans supported? I watched the Breaks monument process very carefully as past member and chair of the Central Montana Resources Advisory Council? I was at every meeting for five years and heard every issue firsthand? The truth is that there are people who just don't like the government, period, so it's easy to get them fired up when you tell them the big bad government is taking away liberties, regardless of the facts? Montanans are always going to need clean streams to fish in and wide open spaces to hunt? Our roadless forest lands and Bureau of Land Management prairie lands are central to healthy wildlife habitat? Our patriotic duty is to protect our state's hunting heritage, not to make short-sighted, mostly selfish decisions that in the long run will take that away from Montanans? Let's remember what matters most? What legacy shall we leave our children and theirs? Public land, open hunting for the common man is a tradition out west? I wish to leave that legacy to my children and, when this heritage is threatened by bad leadership decisions, we need to hold our leaders' feet to the fire? It is far better to manage wisely and preserve our intact systems than it is to dismantle and try to rebuild them later?

Tony Bynum is an award-winning professional photographer, small-business owner and adventure sportsman who lives in East Glacier Park?