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Fisher *House* JOINT RESOLUTION NO. *26*
 INTRODUCED BY *Curtis Crismon Denny Bismard ORR*
Wagner

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA URGING THAT THE NORTHERN REGION FOREST SERVICE REGIONAL OFFICE REMAIN IN MISSOULA; OPPOSING RESTRUCTURING THAT WOULD MOVE THE OFFICE OUT OF MISSOULA; URGING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN FOREST SERVICE RESTRUCTURING DECISIONS AND SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL FEDERAL AGENCY RESTRUCTURING.

WHEREAS, the vital role of our nation's forests was officially recognized in 1891 when the first federal forest reserves were set aside by Congress and the forerunner of the national forest system was established; and

WHEREAS, the people of Montana have long enjoyed both tangible and intangible benefits from the presence and management activities of the United States Forest Service, which is distinct from most federal and other governmental agencies in the strength and diversity of land management and traditions; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has recently proposed a restructuring that would close its Missoula Regional Office and relocate the office's decisionmaking authority and personnel to Denver; and

WHEREAS, Missoula is at the heart of the Forest Service Northern Region, which encompasses 15 national forests, 4 national grasslands, and 28 million acres of forest, including 5 million acres of classified wilderness; has been the center for the forest industry for over a century; and is the site of the University of Montana School of Forestry and the center of forestry activities of the Montana Department of State Lands; and

WHEREAS, forestry research programs at the University of Montana and elsewhere in the Northern Rocky Mountains would likely suffer from the proposed restructuring; and

WHEREAS, the effects of the Forest Service proposal would include the loss of Montana-based decisionmaking authority over Montana national forests to a geographically remote, ecologically unrelated urban area as well as the loss of high-level, professional, skilled Forest Service employees, to the economic detriment of western Montana; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Service has produced no cost-benefit justification for its proposed

1 restructuring or evidence of how restructuring would serve taxpayers and the public interest; and

2 WHEREAS, the proposed consolidation of Forest Service activity in the Denver urban area appears
3 to violate the letter and spirit of the federal Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of
4 1974, specifically 16 U.S.C. 1609, which requires that the Forest Service give priority to locating regional
5 offices in rural areas and towns near the national forests in order to provide the optimum level of
6 convenient, useful services to the public; and

7 WHEREAS, amid current controversy surrounding forest management activities, there is a broad
8 public recognition of the need for continuing dialogue between all segments of the public and public
9 agencies, including the Forest Service.

10
11 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
12 STATE OF MONTANA:

13 That the Northern Region Forest Service Regional Office be retained in Missoula, Montana, and that
14 the office continue to oversee the management of the national forests and grasslands of the Northern
15 Region.

16 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Montana Legislature urge the Montana Congressional
17 Delegation's continued strong opposition to any proposed Forest Service restructuring likely to close or
18 reduce the decisionmaking authority and capability of the Missoula Regional Office.

19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States
20 Forest Service be encouraged to discontinue implementing the proposed restructuring plan and concentrate
21 their efforts on more direct ways of reducing costs and staffing within the current Forest Service structure.

22 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that public participation be encouraged in all Forest Service
23 restructuring decisions to ensure that any restructuring protects Montana and national public and taxpayer
24 interests by requiring:

- 25 (1) an accurate, comprehensive cost-benefits analysis to justify restructuring;
26 (2) adherence to all laws applicable to the management of national forest resources; and
27 (3) that Forest Service personnel reductions or relocations resulting from restructuring, if any, be
28 done in a manner that leaves the maximum number of decisionmaking personnel in each Forest Service
29 office in or near the national forests that those offices oversee.

30 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Legislature support meaningful federal agency restructuring

1 that will result in continued stewardship of the land, better service to the public, actual taxpayer savings,
2 and less, rather than more, federal agency consolidation.

3 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send copies of this resolution to the
4 Montana Congressional Delegation, the United States Secretary of Agriculture, the Chief of the United
5 States Forest Service, and the Regional Forester of the Northern Region.

6 -END-

1 ^{Fisher} ~~House~~ JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 26
 2 INTRODUCED BY Carlus Crismon Denny Brinard ORR
 3 Wagner

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2 INTRODUCED BY CURTISS, CRISMORE, DENNY, BRAINARD, ORR, WAGNER, FISHER

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