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Ryan Zinke's Feet a Poor Fit for Teddy's Boots

A Opinion Piece by Jim Posewitz

June 28, 2016

Dear Friend!:

We wanted to share with you this important opinion piece by acclaimed Montana conservationist, Jim Posewitz, on the continuing threat poised by local and national extremists to "transfer" our cherished public lands to local and private interests.

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While this threat may at times seem distant - as in Washington DC distant - the campaign to disenfranchise Americans of our extraordinary and nationally unique birthright remains very much alive and active. Proponents of 'transfer' have a long-view game plan, and those of us who treasure public lands must remain vigilant.

Jim lives in Helena. He is retired from an exemplary career with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. He is the author of two books about Theodore Roosevelt, "*Rifle in Hand: How Wild America was Saved*," and "*Taking a Bullet for Conservation*," among his many conservation accomplishments and accolades.

We hope you enjoy his views.

Cheers!

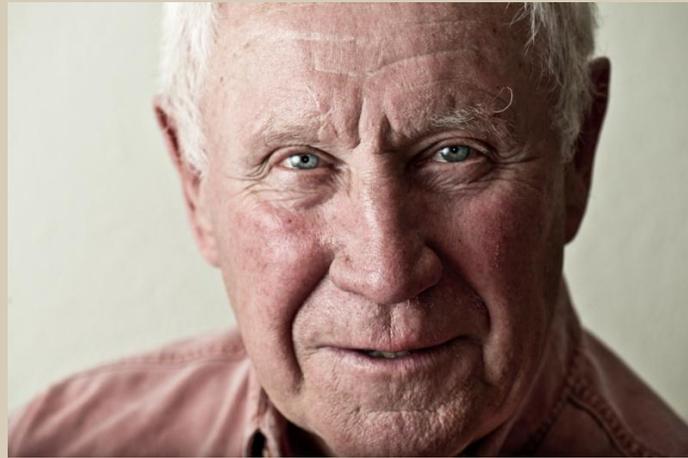


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Ryan Zinke's Feet a Poor Fit for Teddy's Boots

By Jim Posewitz for the Montana Standard

U.S. Representative Ryan Zinke recently claimed that he was a "Teddy Roosevelt Conservationist." He then voted for [H.R. 2316](#), a piece of legislation that would transfer management of four million acres of national forests to state-appointed committees. These committees would be charged with stimulating commodity production and revenue. The multiple-use principle for American forests that Theodore Roosevelt championed would not apply.

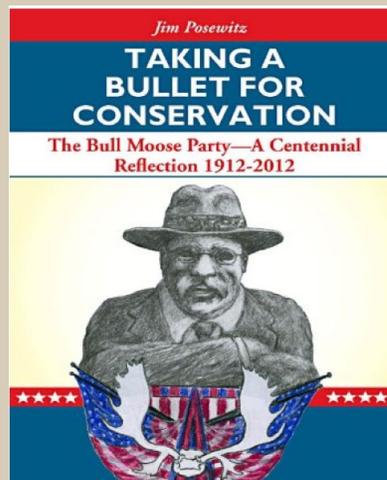


Jim Posewitz. Photo Credit: quoteaddicts.com

Given the impact Roosevelt has had on Montana, it's no wonder that our politicians want to lay claim to his legacy. A closer look, however, suggests Rep. Zinke's "conservation feet" are much too small to fit in Teddy's boots.

Our Montana conservation ethic and our outdoor lifestyle owe a great deal to Roosevelt. During the time he spent living and hunting in the American West he shot a buffalo in Montana, in 1883, experienced a conservation epiphany and, in 1887, established a club for the introduction of the sporting code and restoration of big game. That club got Congress to pass a provision allowing presidents to set aside forest lands for their protection. They called it the "Creative Act." When Roosevelt became president, the Creative Act was in the hands of its creator.

As president, Roosevelt set aside more than 150 million acres as forest reserves and created the U.S. Forest Service. In Montana, new Forest Service lands included the Kootenai, the Custer, the Elkhorns, the Crazy Mountains, the Big and Little Belts, the Little Rockies, the Helena, the Lolo, the Big Hole, the Cabinets, and more. When you also consider the wildlife refuges, game ranges, parks and monuments he protected, the total number of acres he protected exceeds 230 million acres. Those are some big conservation boots.



When Roosevelt left office, the assault on conservation was immediate. His successor, William Taft, began by obstructing an investigation into accusations of corrupt dealings by coal interests in Alaska. Roosevelt's trusted friend and the first chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, protested, so President Taft fired him. After the Great Fire of 1910 burned across parts of Washington, Idaho, and Montana, lawmakers proposed selling the burned land to private interests. The assault on conservation continues to this day, and foes of conservation come by the generation, each with their own scheme. The latest scheme involves transferring American public lands to the states. That's what Rep. Zinke voted for when he voted for H.R. 2316.

H.R. 2316 would allow local interests to exploit our national forests for maximum,

short-term profit - the very thing Roosevelt wanted to prevent when he established the Forest Service. Under H.R. 2316, the Forest Service mandate to protect wildlife habitat, ensure clean water, and provide for multiple types of recreation would be removed.

Politicians have been hacking away at the Forest Service's maintenance and operations budgets for decades. They now whine about the bad management that results from those budget cuts and claim that local control of national resources can solve the problems those cuts have created.

The reality is that exploitive interests have never been able to accept the conservation ethic of our democracy and continue to find ways to undermine that ethic. H.R. 2316 is the latest attempt to undermine that ethic.

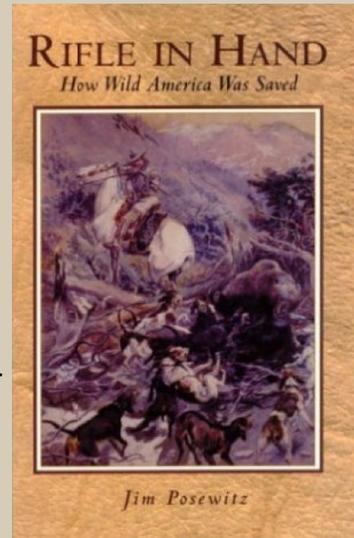
Instead of voting for bills that diminish Roosevelt's conservation legacy, I would encourage Rep. Zinke focus his energy on adequately funding the Forest Service, so it can do the job that our former president intended for it to do.

There is a common cliché that says: "If the shoe fits, wear it." I suggest that Congressman Zinke is not close to fitting Teddy's conservation boots.

– Jim Posewitz

END

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