

# Other Viewpoints

LEDGER  
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## *A special kind of holiday cheer*

by Doug Ferrell

As we gather with family and friends this holiday season and count our blessings, let's remember to give thanks for the extensive forest lands that surround our communities. We are fortunate to be surrounded by large areas of productive forest lands, exceptional recreation opportunities and also some precious remaining wild country.

One thing that deserves special celebration today is the way our communities approach public lands issues, which has become so much more positive, inclusive and constructive in recent years.

Just a decade or two ago opinions on how to manage these lands were intensely polarized. Many people felt there was an inevitable conflict between logging and timber jobs versus conservation values like recreation, wilderness and wildlife habitat.

This conflict mentality was bad for the health of our communities and also a barrier to managing our public lands in a constructive way. We now recognize this earlier time as a dark period when shrill voices and extreme opinions dominated an ugly debate with no good outcomes.

Today there is a growing awareness that the huge amount of public land surrounding our communities provides ample room for a wide variety of uses. If we work together we can gain much more benefit from these lands, and improve our communities socially and economically.

One local group practicing this approach is the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition. Members

of this group represent many diverse points of view, and as we engage on resource issues we have come to realize how strongly our various goals overlap. This productive dialog of respect and consideration is very welcome in today's world.

The KFSC is focused on promoting uses and values that are important to the great majority of community members, not extremist minorities. We recognize that in most cases productive forest lands useful to the timber industry are not part of the remaining wild country valued by so many Montanans.

We have found a remarkable amount of agreement for more active management of productive forest lands, more timber harvesting, more fuel reduction projects, plus more protection for existing wild country including Wilderness designation for deserving special places, more permanency for motorized recreation in some priority areas, and more support for our wonderful system of hiking trails.

We are working to support the Forest Service in achieving these goals, and in minimizing the influence of lawsuits seeking to block these kinds of activities. This approach to working together is really something to bring us cheer this holiday season.

*Doug is a board member of the KFSC, [www.kootenaifuture.org](http://www.kootenaifuture.org). He also serves as board chairman for the Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, [www.scotchmanpeaks.org](http://www.scotchmanpeaks.org).*