

# Pat Williams

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**P**at Williams – born in Helena and reared in Butte – employed his considerable political savvy to do more to protect Montana’s wildlands than almost anyone alive.

Pat served 18 years in Congress from 1979-1997. No one in Montana history has served more consecutive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives than Pat Williams.

As a congressman, Pat helped Montanans protect invaluable landscapes and outdoor opportunities.

In the early 1980s, Pat secured protection for more than 320,000 acres of wilderness and fended off federal government efforts to open the Bob Marshall and Rocky Mountain Front to seismic testing in an area known as the Overthrust Belt.

More than 30 years later, Pat’s effort made possible the permanent protection of that important landscape via the passage of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act of 2013.

His thoughtful and sometimes hard-nosed representation shaped a generation’s perception of wildland protection and the value of wildlands, clean water and wildlife – and the importance those all hold for Montana’s economy and way of life.

Additionally, Pat led the 1980 congressional designations for the Rattlesnake Wilderness near Missoula and the Lee Metcalf Wilderness near Bozeman. The

Rattlesnake legislation included designation of an adjacent national recreation area management emphasizing environmental educational opportunities. Pat’s work, even when legislation stalled, cemented public perceptions that Montana has many areas worthy of federal Wilderness protection.

In that way, Pat similarly championed 1990’s Lolo-Kootenai Accords, an early collaborative effort to balance forest-jobs creation with wildland protection. While legislation fell short, the Accords broke decade-long animosities among mill workers and environmentalist to provide a model to address public-land issues across Montana through meaningful collaboration.

Today, Pat continues his service at the University of Montana’s Center for the Rocky Mountain West and as an outspoken advocate for forest restoration, wilderness protection, education, arts and social justice. A number of years ago, the Missoulian recalled the time when Pat and a friend were on a walk through The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area. A man on a bicycle passed by then stopped and looked their way.

“You’re Pat Williams,” he said, pointing at the retired congressman. “Yes,” came the reply. The man went on to say that they’d met before during the heated debate over the future of the Rattlesnake. He’d been a motorcycle rider back then and was bitterly opposed to the legislation - which did away with motorized recreation. Then he stuck out his hand to Williams. “I want to thank you for saving us from that folly.” We all have Pat to thank.