

Bryan Wells

Oral Testimony-House Sub Committee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

I would like to thank Chairwomen Haaland and members of the House Sub Committee on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands for inviting me to speak today in support of the B-47 Ridge Designation Act.

My name is Bryan Wells and I am the Chairman of the B-47 Memorial Committee and owner of Emigrant Creek Cabins located at the base of Emigrant Peak in Paradise Valley, Montana.

On the evening of July 23, 1962 while on a routine flight from Dyess Air Force Base near Abilene, Texas, four U.S. Air Force crew members lost their lives after their B-47E Strategic Air Command (SAC) bomber crashed at 8500 feet into Emigrant Peak in Paradise Valley, Montana. Strategic Air Command Patrol Bombers were a common sight in our Montana skies during the cold war era. The Strategic Air Command was formed in 1946 to maintain a global nuclear deterrent force.

These four fine young men-CAPT. Joseph Faulconer, LT. Llyod Sawyers, LT. David Sutton and LT. Fredrick Hixenbaugh and their families paid a huge price for our country. Collectively these airmen left behind five young children, four wives and many other family members. I have met with members of each family and they are wonderful people. They all support the B-47 Ridge Designation Act. Their loved ones are interred on the side of this mountain, this is hallowed ground for them. Many of the family members have told me that they knew their loved ones remains didn't make it home and they were burying empty caskets.

The B-47 Ridge Designation Act is not only important to these families it is also important to our community. This tragic event had quite an impact on our community back in 1962. Many folks including my wife heard the explosion and saw the fireball on the side of Emigrant Peak. Our local Forrest Service went to the sight to fight fire. Local ranchers packed in supplies with horses to help in the search and recovery mission. Our local Telephone man laid 4 miles of line to the search and recovery base camp. Malmstrom Air Force Base from Great Falls Montana came to lead the recovery mission. This tragic event is a part of our local history.

This community whole heartedly supports this legislation. Our Veterans groups, County Commissioners, State Legislators, Churches, Sheriff's Department, Local and National Environmental groups, U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative. The B-47 Ridge Designation passed out of the senate with cosponsors from our entire Montana delegation. This bill has bipartisan support.

The B-47 crash site is at 8500 feet above sea level. The sight is not in a wilderness area; the debris field is spread over a mile. There is a sign at the crash site designating it a Heritage sight. This may be one of the most complete B-47 debris fields in existence because of its remoteness.

The B-47 Ridge Designation Act is not unprecedented. There are other military memorials on public land around our state. One example is Bomber Mountain, on the Montana Wyoming

border. There are also several memorials on public lands that honor wildland firefighters that have perished protecting the lands that we love.

We feel the B-47 Ridge Designation Act does two things. It honors the ultimate sacrifice of these young men and their families and it is a public service for future generations. When hikers stumble onto this debris field in the future there will be a marker explaining what happened here and the names of the four young men who perished protecting our country, a reminder of the enormous sacrifices these brave men have made for all of us.