

Letter from Governor Sam Ford to Major General Jay Benedict, January 28, 1942

[Helena, Montana]
January 28, 1942

My Dear General Benedict:

. . . I realize you are extremely busy with many important problems before you but I want to give you somewhat in detail our condition, hoping that this information will be helpful. . . .

Montana is a large State, 739 miles by highway east and west 414 miles north and south, with a population of little more than half a million people. Eastern Montana is largely devoted to farming and livestock, while in the western part are found our mines, smelters, hydro-electric installations, and lumbering industries, all essential to the successful prosecution of the war.

Montana is traversed by three transcontinental railroads [and several local lines]. . . . The destruction of these or their serious damage would result in the interruption of transportation for a considerable period of time. While the Northern Pacific is now being guarded by Federal troops, it is my opinion that there is every reason why the other railroads should likewise be provided with adequate guards.

We have two . . . highway systems extending . . . through the state. . . . As in the case of the railroads there are many large bridges . . . and [their] destruction . . . would result in the complete interruption of highway transportation. . . .

Large smelters are located at Great Falls, Anaconda and East Helena. These are treating

strategic metals, essential in the prosecution of the war. . . . Our copper and other mines are being worked to capacity and producing substantial quantities of strategic minerals. It would be a very serious blow to our war efforts should [they] be damaged or destroyed.

There are in Montana eleven hydro-electric dams, with power lines providing electrical energy for the operation of mines, smelters, and other essential industries in the State. . . .

We have no State troops or home guard of any kind since the National Guard is now in the Federal Service; furthermore, no money is available to State and local authorities to provide protection for the industries indicated above. . . . We have made a rather exhaustive survey to determine whether sufficient guards could be obtained in Montana to adequately protect the installations enumerated. From the information at hand I am convinced that these guards are not available. . . .

I sincerely hope that this information will prove helpful.

Cordially Yours,
Sam C. Ford
Governor of Montana

Source: *Montana Governors Records, 1889–1962*. Manuscript Collection 35 [box 121 folder 15]. Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 202–203.