

Prepared Statement for the Record of Sam Aanestad
California State Senator
4th Senate District

Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
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Statement of Opposition to H.R. 233

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members:

My name is Sam Aanestad. I am here today to oppose HR233.

I am the State Senator representing California's 4th Senate District, which covers over 23,000 square miles from Sacramento to the Oregon border. It's about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire put together, and is one of the largest state legislative districts in America, comprised of 12 rural counties covering the Sacramento Valley, the Klamath Basin, the Sierra-Nevada Foothills, and the Northern-most Pacific Coastline. It contains the watersheds of the Klamath, the Sacramento, the Feather, and the Yuba River systems, supplying approximately 80 per cent of the water that flows south to Southern California. With its millions of acres in forests and agriculture, it is one of the most scenic and beautiful areas of America. I represent the nearly 1 million residents who call this district home.

Unfortunately, it is also home to some of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. In fact, unemployment rates in nearly every Northern California county are nearly double the statewide average.

It wasn't always that way.

Prior to 1990, this land was home to a thriving forest resources industry, with over 140 sawmills providing thousands of jobs and millions of board feet of lumber for the exploding growth on the West Coast. Forests were managed and thrived.

But since 1990, governmental and environmental restrictions have brought my district to its knees. An area that was once rich in resources and jobs now suffers from chronic unemployment and welfare subsistence. The threat of catastrophic wildfire as a result of forest mismanagement is a nightmare that has become an everyday reality.

Of those 140 Northern California sawmills, more than 80 of them have closed since 1990, thanks to environmental restrictions. That's a mortality rate of 60%.

The closure of these sawmills has led to the direct loss of 15,000 forestry jobs in Northern California and countless personal and business bankruptcies. Entire communities have been lost because of lack of work.

Crescent City Harbor in Del Norte County was once home to the largest commercial fishing operation in Northern California waters – over 600 fishing boats, all buying fuel and food, providing jobs, and paying taxes.

Today – thanks to governmental and environmental restrictions on both the federal and state levels – those numbers have dwindled to less than 60 boats, and most of the fuel and supplies are purchased in nearby Oregon. Recent anti-trawling legislation is resulting in an even faster out-migration. Only one major fish processing facility remains on the Northern California coast – and that is located in Eureka – not Crescent City.

What went so terribly wrong?

Since the creation of little-used and little-visited Redwood National Park in 1968, millions of acres have been taken off the tax rolls of several Northern California counties.

Del Norte County already includes the Smith River National Recreation Area, a 300,000-acre designation that severely limits multiple-use of forest resources. With 50,000 acres of Federal Wilderness, 27,000 acres of National and State Redwood Parks and another 26,000 acres of State Parks added just last year, we find that more than 75% of the land in Del Norte County is already owned by the government. It's been taken away from the people – piece by piece – by bills such as the one before you today – H.R. 233.

Just one hour's drive from the coastal communities we now have the Siskiyou Wilderness Area, the Marble Mountain Wilderness Area, the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area, and the North Fork Wilderness Area. In that same hour's drive, we have the Six Rivers National Forest, the Klamath National Forest, and the Trinity National Forest. Then there's the Redwood National Park and the Smith River National Recreation Area. And there are more, but I think you get the point.

Today – before you – is legislation that would remove even more land from public use. It would take another 40-thousand

acres away from Del Norte County and put it under lock and key. As has happened in other Wilderness Areas, forests will grow unmanaged, motor vehicles will be banned, and roads will be closed – even for fire-fighters. The use of the land is lost.

When I started representing Del Norte County -- I was struck by the abject poverty of the area, and the determination of the people of Del Norte County to bring their county back to the thriving working community it once was. In the last 30 years Del Norte County has been the victim of well-meaning federal land use policy and the broken promises that accompanied those decisions.

What were those broken promises?

It was promised that the loss of the forestry jobs under the creation of Redwood National Park would be more than replaced by jobs created by a new tourism industry. The promise was made that more than one million people would visit the new park – in just its first year of operation.

Instead – the rest of the nation yawned. Redwood National Park hasn't drawn one million tourists in its entire 37 years of operation. And when people do come – they don't stay for a week or two. There are few lodging facilities. Visitors stay for perhaps 30 minutes – then move on.

That's because decisions by The California Coastal Commission bar tourism development by denying permits for golf courses, airport expansion, and highway improvement.

In short – there is no tourism industry. There are no tourism jobs. There is only poverty.

In the last 30 years the people of Del Norte have worked incredibly hard to preserve the economic health of their county. At the same time they have seen the loss of hundreds of high paying forestry jobs and the complete gutting of a once prosperous fishing industry.

Despite the fact that Del Norte County is home to some of the most beautiful and productive land, rivers, and coast line in the world, this county has been forced to house a high security state prison (which doesn't always pay its bills to private and public vendors) and Indian casinos which help support and maintain what is left of the economy.

An economy that has been gutted by federal land use policy.

And now – before you – we have a bill that offers the same false hope and promise. But in reality – it's another sucker punch to the economic stomach of Del Norte County.

I'm here today to urge you Mr. Chair and members – to do something that Congressman Thompson has not done. Listen to the voices of Del Norte County.

Listen to the Board of Supervisors. The elected leaders of Del Norte County who pleaded with Congressman Thompson two years ago for no further "Wilderness Act" designations in Del Norte County."

A Board of Supervisors who have taken public action to officially oppose HR 233.

Those concerns have been ignored.

In fact, I find it interesting that Mr. Thompson's previous attempt for this Wilderness designation, namely HR 1501 last year, included identifying "Del Norte County" in the Sec. 2 Designation of Wilderness Areas, but omits identifying Del Norte County by name in HR 233.

H.R. 233 is bad legislation, Mr. Chairman and Members. It promises the loss of more jobs and business. It promises a loss to what potential tax base Del Norte County has left. It creates forest mismanagement and handcuffs wildfire suppression. And it contradicts the will of the people who live there.

I urge you to defeat this bill and allow the residents of Del Norte County to build a stable economy based on a wise use of our natural resources.

Thank you.