

DON AMADOR  
WESTERN REPRESENTATIVE – BLUERIBBON COALITION

TESTIMONY  
BEFORE THE FOREST AND FOREST HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HEARING ON H.R. 233  
THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COASTAL  
WILD HERITAGE WILDERNESS ACT  
1337 LHOB – JULY 14, 2005  
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Testimony – Statement by the BLUERIBBON COALITION on HR233 to designate certain public lands in Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, and Lake Counties in the State of California as Wilderness or as a Backcountry Recreation Area and to designate certain segments of the Black Butte River in Mendocino County, California as Wild or Scenic River.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the BlueRibbon Coalition (BRC), I want to thank you and the other distinguished members of the Forest and Forest Health Subcommittee for the privilege to testify on H..R 233. I am Don Amador the Western Representative for the BlueRibbon Coalition, based in Pocatello, Idaho.

The BlueRibbon Coalition is a national recreation group that champions responsible use of public and private lands, and encourages individual environmental stewardship. It represents over 10,000 individual members and 1,100 organization and business members, for a combined total of over 600,000 recreationists nationwide. I am a native of the Redwood Empire and was born and raised in Eureka.

BRC members work hard to promote a responsible land-use ethic and donate literally thousands of hours to maintain our existing trail and recreational facilities on lands managed by the USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BRC also supports the intent of the original Wilderness Act of 1964 as, “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions...”

BRC supports the designation of Wilderness in areas that truly meet the characteristics identified in the 1964 Wilderness Act, and where obvious evidence of human development, such as roads, does not exist and has not existed. We also support management of Wilderness areas for the use and enjoyment of the American people as required in the Act.

As you know, BRC reviewed basically the same proposal last year and testified before the U.S. Senate on that subject. After an on-the-ground field review last summer of much of the proposed legislation, BRC could not support any of the Wilderness proposals based on our view that it would negatively impact public access of existing roads and trails used by motorized and mechanized recreationists. Hunters would have had many dispersed campsites and associated logging-spur roads closed to vehicle use by the bill.

However, several new circumstances have prompted BRC to reevaluate H.R. 233 to see if a win-win compromise can be reached. BRC appreciated reading Jay Watson’s comments in the 9/2/04 Land Letter article – AT 40, LANDMARK LAW PROTECTING AMERICA’S WILD LANDS TESTED IN NEW WAYS. As the Wilderness Society’s advocate for H.R 233 he stated that he believed in cooperation with other user groups. He also noted that recreationists will have to give a little too.

Mr. Chairman, I was also impressed by the outreach to all parties by Chairman Richard Pombo regarding resolutions in the Wilderness debate as stated in his May 13, 2004 letter to Congressman Rick Larsen (attachment A). He clearly articulated his principles and criteria for any new Wilderness designations.

Based on encouragement by Mr. Watson to find solutions and following the tenets of Chairman Pombo’s letter to Congressman Larsen, I facilitated a “Wilderness tour” of the Redwood Empire in April of this year. The purpose of this trip was to meet with various access and recreation interests in Northwestern California to see if they would be interested in trying to find a compromise position on H.R. 233 while following the Wilderness and Backcountry Recreation Area designation policies of the BRC.

During the aforementioned dates, BRC met with representatives of the following organizations; Open Beaches and Trails

Group, District 36 of the American Motorcyclist Association, Surfer's Public Access Restoration Coalition, Lost Coast 4x4s, Northcoast Recreation Coalition, Cliff Hangers 4WD Club, Humboldt Track and Trail, Far West Motorcycle Club, Friends of the Beach, the Grange, King Range inholders, several Del Norte County Supervisors, Off-Highway Solutions, and State Senator Sam Aanestad's Office.

While some groups were interested in trying to find a win-win compromise, all parties said they were tired of the failed promises of eco-tourism. They are fed up with the efforts by the "Wilderness lobby" in Washington DC to further restrict access to, or use of, public land.

We all felt that the 30-year decline in the region's economy is directly related to the increase of land-use restrictions on federal lands during that time period. As a mill-worker making good wages at Cal-Pacific Lumber Company in the mid 1970s, I remember how the founding of the Redwood National Park and its anti-access policies put my mill out of business and placed countless thousands of residents out of work.

If recreationists are going to support any part of H.R. 233, Congress must provide some relief in the form of reopening closed roads, trails, and areas to off-highway vehicles, equestrians, and mountain bike enthusiasts. Also, active forest and range management for fire and fuels should also be included in any new legislation.

BRC agrees with the directives in Chairman Pombo's letter to Congressman Larsen regarding the need for Congress to address the release of WSAs not designated as Wilderness. BRC believes that our Backcountry Recreation Area concept is an appropriate land designation or classification when it comes to the disposition of WSAs and roadless areas. Congress could prescribe the activities it wants to occur in those areas such as motorized and non-motorized recreation, camping, active forest and range management prescriptions, and other uses.

BRC has spoken in positive terms regarding outreach by Wilderness advocates on this bill. However, we find said outreach to be substantively lacking regarding H.R. 233. Green groups have been working on this proposal since the late 1990s, yet not once have they met with the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors in session to discuss finding win-win solutions. The Wilderness advocates claim to have met with "off-road" groups and have received their support. When I have asked them to produce the names of individuals or organizations they are referencing, I get no reply. They also claim to have had substantive meetings with "timber" representatives and have gotten their vote. Yet, the largest timber association in the state, the California Forestry Association, issued a letter (attachment B) this spring in opposition to the bill.

The California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) and Congressman's Thompson's staff have repeatedly stated that their bill will not close any roads or dispersed campsites. Yet, on a recent field trip with the bill's proponents in Del Norte County a BRC member noted that Ryan Henson, lead spokesman for CWC, had to continually redraw the maps as roads, trails, and other national forest facilities were identified as being impacted by the closure tenets of H.R. 233.

Based on the aforementioned BRC policies on Wilderness, our Backcountry Recreation Area designation concept, feedback from the Redwood Empire Tour, offers of outreach by green groups, and the tenets of Chairman Pombo's letter to Congressman Larsen on Wilderness designations and the disposition of exiting WSAs and roadless areas, the BRC is proud to offer our alternative proposal to H.R. 233.

## BRC ACCESS AND RECREATION ALT. TO HR 233

109th CONGRESS

1st Session

H. R. (NUMBER TO BE ASSIGNED)

To designate certain National Forest System lands in the Mendocino National Forest and certain Bureau of Land Management lands in Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties in the State of California as wilderness or as a backcountry recreation area.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DATE.

Access interests are hereby offering a compromise bill to Mr. THOMPSON's H.R. 233.

A COMPROMISE ALTERNATIVE BILL

To designate certain National Forest System lands in the Mendocino and Six

Rivers National Forests and certain Bureau of Land Management lands in Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties in the State of California as wilderness or as a backcountry recreation area.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

## SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Access and Recreation Alternative to the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act'.

## SEC. 2. DESIGNATION OF WILDERNESS AREAS, COASTAL CALIFORNIA.

In accordance with the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131 et seq.), the following areas in the State of California are designated as wilderness areas and as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System

Or designated as a backcountry recreation area(s):

### SNOW MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT-

IN GENERAL- Certain land in the Mendocino National Forest, comprising Approximately 600 acres, as generally depicted on the attached map (attachment C)

### SNOW MOUNTAIN BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREA

Certain land in the Mendocino National Forest, comprising approximately 22,000 acres, as generally depicted on the attached map (attachment C)

Motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized recreation shall be prescribed activities. Unit shall be actively managed for fire and fuels.

MAD RIVER BUTTES BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREA - Certain land in the Six Rivers National Forest, comprising approximately 6,494 acres, as generally depicted on the map (attachment D). Motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized uses shall be prescribed uses. Unit shall be actively managed for fire and fuels.

CACHE CREEK BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREA - Certain land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in Lake County, California, comprising approximately 30,870 acres, as generally depicted on the map (attachment E). Mechanized and non-motorized uses shall be prescribed uses. Unit shall be actively managed for fire and fuels.

SOUTH FORK EEL RIVER BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREA - Certain land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in Mendocino County, California, comprising approximately 12,915 acres, as generally depicted on the map (attachment E) Mechanized and non-motorized recreation shall be prescribed uses in all portions of this area except the Red Mountain unit where motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized recreation shall be prescribed uses. Unit shall be actively managed for fire and fuels.

KING RANGE WILDERNESS - Certain land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in Humboldt County, California, comprising approximately 6,400 acres, as generally depicted on the map (attachment F), which shall be known as the 'King Range Wilderness'.

### KING RANGE BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREA AND RELEASE OF WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS.

Lands (approx. 43 thousand acres – attachment E) in the King Range National Conservation Area not designated as wilderness by this Congress and Act shall be released for multiple-use and sustained yield management (or designated as a Backcountry Recreation area). This supplants the current WSA quasi-wilderness management prescriptions of the with multiple-use management policies where motorized and mechanized uses are prescribed uses. Active management of the non-wilderness areas will include sanitation facilities (i.e. Vault SST toilets, etc.) at key access points on the coastal trail and elsewhere as needed. A technical review team (TRT) comprised of motorized and non-motorized recreation interests, inholders and other parties shall be established. The secretary shall establish the TRT no later than one year after this Act is signed and in accordance with applicable guidelines and policies.

## RELEASE OF ADDITIONAL WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS.

Finding- Congress finds that, for the purposes of section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1782), any portion of wilderness study areas in Mendocino, Lake, or Humboldt Counties that are not designated as Wilderness or as a Backcountry Recreation Area by this Act or any previous Act shall be released to multiple-use and sustained yield management.

## ADMINISTRATION OF BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION AREAS

History has shown that administrative action has been unable to resolve the underlying conflicts associated with these lands. It is imperative that Congress takes some specific action to put this issue to rest. Congress needs to establish a new land designation that provides the protection the public demands for these lands while at the same time providing the managing agencies the necessary management flexibility to respond to recreational demands and address critical concerns of forest health, fire prevention and wildlife habitat enhancement.

In general, most of the lands included in the Roadless Inventory are undeveloped. Evidence of man's activities may be present and obvious to a knowledgeable observer. However, evidence is not dominant and the landscape is generally perceived as possessing natural, primitive, rustic or backcountry characteristics. Similar characteristics occur in Wilderness Study Areas as well. It is important that these characteristics be maintained under any land designation category established by Congress.

These lands provide a very valuable resource for recreational activities that allow people to experience and enjoy natural appearing landscapes. They provide opportunities for people to escape from the pressures of the everyday world. This can include a wide range of recreational activities including hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, hiking, off-highway motorcycling, horseback riding, ATV use, bicycling or use of 4-wheel drive vehicles. At the same time, many of these lands are threatened by insect and disease epidemics and by catastrophic wildfires that could destroy the very values that the public wants to see preserved. Therefore, it is essential that this land designation also allow the managing agencies the ability to apply a minimum level of management to deal with these threats.

BRC is proud of our backcountry recreation area concept and our efforts to find a compromise alternative to H.R. 233. BRC believes that our proposal for the King Range in particular offers a golden opportunity to restore the historic access and recreation tenets (Chairman Hansen's letter - attachment G) of the King Range Act of 1970.

BRC looks forward to working with this Congress to improve recreational opportunities and access to our federal lands while protecting our resources for the public not from the public.