

TESTIMONY OF
MATTHEW BLOOM
on behalf of the
NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
SUB-COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REGARDING H.R. 3606: "EMIGRANT WILDERNESS HISTORICAL USE
PRESERVATION ACT OF 2013"

March 6, 2014

Chairman Bishop and members of the committee I would like to thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the urgent need to protect historic and traditional activities in the Emigrant Wilderness Area.

I come before you today as a board member of the National Forest Recreation Association and the owner of Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station. The National Forest Association (NFRA) was formed in 1948, and represents recreation businesses located on or near federal lands throughout the United States. Most of our members hold authorizations, permits or contracts for providing services and facilities directly on federal lands. A partial list of authorizing agencies includes the: Forest Service, National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation. They also operate facilities under contracts with state and local agencies, public utility companies, and conservation districts. NFRA members are vital 'recreation service partners' of the federal land management agencies in providing recreational opportunities to the public. NFRA members have a wealth of experience providing front line service to the public, along with maintaining safe and desirable facilities. Members have served generations of national and international users, and continue to provide lifelong memories to visitors each year. NFRA members work directly with the governing agencies and strive to maintain a cooperative and communicative relationship.

Many NFRA members offer horseback trips into wilderness areas throughout the west, and some were actually involved with meetings with congressional representatives for the original Wilderness Act. They have also been involved in discussions and boundaries for additions to the wilderness system for the past 50 years. The Association has always been supportive of ensuring that the public has access to these wild lands. With the decline in

wilderness use seen since the 1970's, the Association is keenly aware of the need to protect the traditional uses that enable visitors to access and enjoy these wild lands. My family has been visiting, living, and working in the Emigrant Wilderness since 1927. My grandfather and father inspired a love and respect for the wilderness that I have proudly passed on to my children. Our family business, Kennedy Meadows, has been in operation since 1917. We offer pack trips into the Emigrant Wilderness, and Yosemite National Park. We provide stock support for hikers, fisherman, hunters, horsemen, people with disabilities, and folks from all walks of life and experiences. I come to you today to urge your support for H.R. 3606 and help protect access to these long honored traditions and historic uses for the vast majority of the public and generations to come.

The Emigrant Wilderness is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. It is bordered by Yosemite National Park to the south and the Carson Iceberg Wilderness to the north. This area lies entirely within Tuolumne County and is approximately 150 miles east of San Francisco. The Emigrant Wilderness encompasses 113,000 acres ranging in elevation from 5,000 feet to 11,570 feet.

For 10,000 years, Native Americans would spend the summer and fall in the Emigrant Wilderness. They would hunt, fish, camp and trade in the Sierras. Following the discovery of gold in 1848 settlers crossed the sierras headed for the gold fields of California. In 1852, the Clark Skidmore party became the first to cross the Sierras via Emigrant Pass located within the boundaries of the Emigrant Wilderness. Many of the lakes, meadows, and streams were named after the settlers and their endeavors. In 1931, the Emigrant Basin was designated as the "Emigrant Basin Primitive Area" and on January 4, 1975 congress designated it as the Emigrant Wilderness Area.

In 1975, public support for designating the Emigrant as wilderness was overwhelming. There was, however, concern by the public that wilderness designation would lead to restricted access of traditional activities such as horseback riding, hiking, hunting, fishing, camping. Congressmen, Senators, wilderness groups, and the Forest Service all assured the concerned public that designation would not impact these traditional wilderness uses.

In 1974, Senator report 93-1043 Senator Haskell state that the " Emigrant Wilderness is an area where a true wilderness experience can be enjoyed on a single day hike into Blue Canyon area or on a two week pack trip to some of the more remote lakes or peaks." He also said, "This area is characteristic of the untrammelled portions of central California's Sierras. It offers fine trout fishing, good hunting, wonderful scenery and peace and quiet for those seeking solitude. Here wilderness hiking, riding, and camping are at the best."

On October 8th, 1973, the committee on Public Lands held a hearing on proposed designation of the Emigrant Basin Primitive area as wilderness in this very same room. Harry Crandell of the Wilderness Society testified that the proposed wilderness area "receives much use, yet retains its wilderness quality, with few signs of man noticeable. Here, indeed man is a visitor who does not remain. The imprint of man's work is barely discernible and in the few places where it exists, is impermanent. With the increasing need and desire of a crowded population to have access to the unconfined recreational possible only in the wilderness."

Since the designation of the Emigrant as wilderness in 1975, use has changed significantly. Visitor numbers across the board and especially horse use has dropped as much as 50%. All user groups have adopted lighter impact philosophies. Leave No Trace and overall appreciation of wilderness values has increased significantly. Despite all these facts, radical wilderness groups and many wilderness managers within the Forest Service continue to levy heavier and heavier restrictions and regulations. In 1975 wilderness designation was strongly supported by the public under the promise made by large national wilderness groups and congress that traditional uses would not be impacted.

Since the passage of the legislation creating the Emigrant Wilderness, these promises have been broken one by one. The Forest Service has placed more and more restrictions on use. Radical wilderness groups have filed lawsuits against the Forest Service for allowing traditional uses in wilderness. Major national wilderness groups have sat by quietly and allowed smaller, more radical groups to promote their very restrictive interpretation of the wilderness act. Wilderness management planners have adopted a purist philosophy that severely restricts traditional uses such as campfires, stock use, cross country travel, fishing, hiking, and many other wilderness activities. Some examples include the following. In the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness and in Yosemite National Park it is now illegal to take stock more than ¼ mile off a “system trail.” This has eliminated approximately 70% of these areas from access by horsemen. As a result of a lawsuit filed by radical wilderness groups, packers on the eastside of the Sierras are restricted to one pack animal per two customers, campfires are illegal in most areas, grazing of the pack stock is not allowed in most meadows. This lawsuit was a huge blow for public access to wilderness and has severely impacted historic pack stations and businesses that rely on the wilderness. Within the Emigrant Wilderness, Forest Service management plans call for heavy restrictions of campfires, create huge areas that any sign of man is unacceptable, removal of historic structures and trails and implementation of unneeded quotas. These are just some examples of what has been happening over the last 30 years and it has to be stopped. This radical perversion of the wilderness act is not supported by the majority of the public.

The wilderness act was one of the greatest laws ever written in this country. The National Forest Recreation Association, Kennedy Meadows, my family, and most of the public, who love wild places whole heartedly, support the wilderness act as it was originally intended. The purpose of H.R. 3606 is to simply preserve the historic and traditional uses of the Emigrant Wilderness and preserve the original intent of Congress. This legislation is specific to the Emigrant Wilderness and should reinforce the wilderness act and protect this area from radical anti-use ideology and ensure access for all. H.R.3606 would ensure that levels of use present in 1975 would never be exceeded and that traditional uses that were acceptable in 1975 continue. This bill would protect the area from being overused and also protect access for future generations. Passage of HR 3606 will preserve public access for visitors of all abilities and disabilities. Pack stock provide access for people who without help from outfitters and would never be able to experience and appreciate the wonders of wild places. If people don't visit and appreciate wilderness, then support for it will be lost.

It is just as important that congress and the public protect wilderness from an encroaching civilization as well as protecting it from over regulation and restrictions that lead to diminishing support for our national wilderness system. Aldo Leopold said it best when he wrote,

“The time is almost upon us when a pack train must wind its way up a graveled highway and turn its bell mare into the pasture of a summer hotel. When the day comes, the diamond hitch will be merely a rope; Kit Carson and Jim Bridger will be only names in a history lesson... If, once in a while a man has a chance to throw the diamond hitch and travel back in time, he is just that much more civilized than he would have been without that opportunity...”

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking the chairman and all the committee members for the opportunity to speak with you today and urge your support for HR 3606. I strongly feel that legislation is the only way to ensure an enduring wilderness for generations to come as was intended by congress originally. I look forward to providing any additional information.

Thank You,

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