

Testimony of Carole King Klein
before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
H.R. 980 Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA)
May 5, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hastings, and honorable members of the subcommittee:

I am submitting testimony as a 32 year Idaho resident on behalf of myself and other residents of the bioregion as well as citizens across America who've been waiting 18 years for this legislation to become the law of the land. Among other things, I hope to dispel some of the myths that opponents keep repeating, for example, the "top-down" myth.

NREPA is a bottom-up, grass roots effort conceived by local residents who understood the ecological and economic benefits of protecting an ecosystem owned by all Americans.

Nearly 20 years ago biologists, economists, business owners, and individuals who lived and earned their living in the Northern Rockies bioregion drafted the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA) [pronounced Ner-EE-pa.] Those eminent scientists and other citizens understood the benefits of NREPA then, and those who are still alive understand that the benefits are even more urgently needed today.

Exhibit 1: Letter from locals originally involved in drafting NREPA

Today's bill is essentially the same, minus the million acres we've lost by not passing NREPA. Numerous businesses and grass roots organizations from all five of the affected states support H.R.980. NREPA is also supported by national organizations such as the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Humane Society.

<http://www.wildrockiesalliance.org/about/membergroups.html>

Exhibits 2, 3, and 4: Letters from Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Humane Society

NREPA designates as Wilderness inventoried roadless areas in the Northern Rockies ecosystem and connects the five smaller ecosystems within the greater Northern Rockies ecosystem with biological corridors that allow wildlife to move more freely. The corridors ensure species' survival and also mitigate the effect of global warming by allowing species to migrate to cooler elevations.

A majority of Americans across party lines favor designating more Wilderness. Out of the more than four million [a large number!] of public comments on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, 95% have been favorable.

One early NREPA supporter was former President Jimmy Carter, who in 1993 wrote the following: (President Carter's letter appears on pages 6-7 of the printed record of a hearing on H.R. 2638 (NREPA) on May 4, 1994 before a joint session of the Agriculture and Merchant Marine and Fisheries Subcommittees.)

"NREPA heralds a new era in public lands management, based upon securing the integrity of the ecosystem in a biologically and economically sustainable way. NREPA is also cost-effective legislation. It will eliminate the practice of below-cost timber sales that have burdened taxpayers to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

"NREPA has the strong support of the American People, who own these public lands. At a time when only 5% of America's original pristine forests still remain, it is our duty and obligation to protect and restore these national treasures as we have enjoyed them and been sustained by them physically, mentally, and spiritually."

In the 16 years since the former president wrote those words the number of America's remaining original pristine forests has decreased from 5% to 3%.

NREPA does *not* affect private land. Section 204 specifically states: "Private lands are not affected by this Title." and "No private landowner ... shall be compelled, under any circumstances, to comply with this title." Let me repeat that. NO private land is affected by NREPA.

NREPA does *not* affect grazing, does *not* affect existing mining claims, and does *not* eliminate logging. 95% of the suitable timber base will be open to logging and multiple use under NREPA. In fact, Section 203 specifically recognizes The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act.

In 2000 the Forest Service valued the water protected by NREPA at a billion dollars. The value is higher now, and it will only get higher. The headwaters on both sides of the Continental Divide provide water to over 60 million Americans. That water belongs to all Americans. Absent NREPA, those headwaters are vulnerable to degradation that will send the water down in spring when farmers and ranchers don't need it. NREPA's protection holds the water in higher elevations until summer when it's most needed.

NREPA slows climate change by protecting a large intact carbon sink. I refer you to Dr. William Newmark's 2007 and 2009 testimony before this Subcommittee and to a Duke University study showing that forests retain the most carbon when they aren't logged. Reducing global warming is increasingly recognized as a positive economic and ecological contribution by forests. NREPA's protection will add value in both regards.

From the Duke University study published in *Forest Ecology and Management* 255 (2008) 1122–1134 entitled *Public Land, Timber Harvests, And Climate Mitigation: Quantifying Carbon Sequestration Potential On U.S. Public Timberlands*:

"Expanding the area of land in forest cover, avoiding deforestation, and managing existing forests to store carbon in ecosystem stocks for longer periods by increasing the length of time between harvests can increase the net size of the carbon sink or, in some cases, turn a source into a sink."

"... public timberlands constitute a sizable share of the U.S. forest resource in terms of both land area and timber volume and thereby provide a potentially important resource to manage for climate change mitigation."

Last year the United States Department of Agriculture established an Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets to "place a currency on the valuable services our environment provides, such as water filtration and air purification, carbon sequestration, pollination and recreation." <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/SM1056-001.htm>

The USDA is showing tremendous leadership in educating the American people about how protected forests potentially have more economic value than unprotected forests. Protection of land, water, and wildlife is an economic model for the West. If there is any doubt, we must err on the side of protection.

NREPA will create 2300 high paying jobs restoring damaged areas called Wildland Recovery Areas that local biologists have deemed essential for the survival of species in the ecosystem. Where will the money come from? From the money we'll save by passing NREPA—and there'll still be some savings left over.

Every year without NREPA, taxpayers are paying 37.5 million dollars annually to build roads to subsidize timber sales that cover only 10% of the cost of the road. For years taxpayers from Arizona, New York, Tennessee, Texas, and every other state have been spending the other 90% to destroy land, water, and wildlife that belong to all Americans. 375 million dollars over the next ten years isn't a lot of money compared to, say, the financial cost of the war in Iraq, but even factoring in the cost of the jobs, NREPA will save taxpayers 245 million dollars over the next decade.

NREPA will put people to work restoring our National Forests by removing old unused logging roads and repairing a million acres of clearcuts and the streams that cross them. NREPA will indirectly create thousands more jobs by preserving a pristine environment that is the economic base of the Northern Rockies states.

Another myth accuses NREPA of "locking up" land. We hear this rhetoric from opponents every time there's a Wilderness bill; yet after such bills pass, these same people fight fiercely for their local wilderness. In an article titled "It's The Wilderness, Stupid." Montana journalist Bill Schneider illustrates how local politicians can sometimes be slower than their constituents to recognize wilderness as a long-term, sustainable economic engine.

"In the late 1970s, when an energy company proposed "Bombing the Bob," [Bob Marshall Wilderness] setting off a string of seismic charges to search for fossil fuel, surprise, politicians and chamber presidents who worship anything-jobs were

in an uproar... When the push comes, all-business people understand how their bread gets buttered.”

Recapping: NREPA protects, saves, and creates. So why did we need representatives from outside the region to introduce this bill? Why would local elected officials oppose a bill that protects land, water and wildlife, saves money, and creates jobs? Sometimes it’s hard for western politicians to hear the hum of a grass-roots movement over the roar of sagebrush rebellion rhetoric fanned by large corporations who don’t want to lose their taxpayer-funded subsidies; foreign off-road vehicle manufacturers; and developers who decimate and depart.

Sublette County, Wyoming, appears to be putting all its eggs into the oil-soaked baskets of drilling and motorized recreation. But if Sublette County doesn’t protect its other basket of abundant natural beauty and the wildlife a healthy ecosystem supports, its residents may wake up one day, as some communities have, to find the providers of short-term abundance gone and their sustainable abundance lost.

Problems associated with Sublette County’s rapid growth are documented in a paper entitled *Social & Economic Impacts to Sublette County, WY from Natural Gas Development* prepared by citizens of Wyoming.

http://www.sublette-se.org/files/long_impact_summary.pdf

The supply of oil and gas is finite. The timber industry’s problems are not going to be solved by failing to pass NREPA. Mining jobs are seasonal and not necessarily reliable. And farmers and ranchers understand the importance of protecting their headwaters. Tourism is a proven, sustainable economic engine. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks says that hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching bring more money into the state than logging, mining or agriculture. Every year during steelhead season anglers spend literally millions of dollars in my county. They’re not coming to stand in off-road vehicle ruts filled with mud. I refer you to Gary MacFarlane’s testimony for photos of off-road vehicle damage in Idaho.

Some of my fellow Idahoans publicly express antipathy to wilderness in a social climate that encourages that view, yet a 2005 poll showed a majority of Idahoans in favor of designating more Wilderness. In hard times my neighbors depend on elk and deer for their winter supply of meat. Elk and deer need protected habitat.

In times of war, our men and women in uniform fight to protect the American homeland. I’m asking Congress to protect the *natural* American homeland to which we all pray they will return safely.

Montana photographer George Wuerthner’s photos of the Bitterroot and other wild places illustrate why we need to protect the Northern Rockies. George’s photos at <http://www.wildrockiesalliance.org> will make you want to visit the bioregion—which is of course the point. If you like George’s photos, imagine experiencing these views in 3MD [three majestic dimensions].

It’s time to pour water on the fire myth. Opponents say, mistakenly, “We can’t

get into Wilderness to fight wildfires.” As a practical matter—and I know this because in 2005 a wildfire threatened my home in Idaho—where there are homes, there are roads. Where there are roads, vehicles can be brought in to fight fires. Where there are no roads, smokejumpers (speaking of heroes!) can and do go in on foot. The 1964 Wilderness Act recognizes that insects and fire are part of how nature manages forests, but it does allow some agency discretion in controlling insects, disease and fire.

The Forest Service's own wildfire experts advise that biomass projects should focus on Home Ignition Zones, that is, 100 feet from a home. The word “biomass” gives me pause because it can and likely will be used by the timber industry as an excuse to invade wild forests. A research scientist for the Forest Service who specializes in fire science, Jack Cohen, writes: "By definition, wildland-urban interface fire disasters depend on homes igniting during wildfires. If homes do not ignite and burn during wildfires, then the WUI fire problem largely does not exist.”

Mr. Cohen’s paper, *The Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Problem: A Consequence of the Fire Exclusion Paradigm*, was published in the Fall 2008 issue of *Forest History Today*. Mr. Cohen examines the Forest Service's organizational mindset that persistently frames the Wildland-Urban Interface fire problem in terms of fire suppression and control to the exclusion of potentially more effective alternatives.

While NREPA allows biomass removal to prevent fires in areas close to homes or roads, biomass removal is unnecessary and destructive in the middle of roadless areas where dead trees *and* living trees function as fish and wildlife habitat and help keep our water clean by rebuilding soils and filtering water. Two-thirds of the wildlife species in the Northern Rockies depend on whole dead trees lying on the ground for their survival, as opposed to the stumps that provide much less opportunity for forest regeneration and soil stability. When you lose topsoil, you lose everything.

We have forests because, over aeons of non-human intervention, nature didn't screw up. I applaud the foresight of conservationists such as Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and Stephen Mather—all Eastern Republicans—who saw the need to protect a lot of land at a time when the supply seemed infinite. This year, you were thoughtful enough to pass the Omnibus Public Land Management Act. I applaud you for your leadership in knowing that the supply of wild land is diminishing, that some humans do screw things up, and that some places need to be saved.

Anticipating the question from opponents, “Was the Omnibus bill not enough?”

Not if it didn’t protect the Northern Rockies ecosystem.

The “County Commissioners” myth: After the last NACo meeting a few County Commissioners went to Congress to say that they hadn’t been consulted about X or Y legislation. But we who support NREPA do work with our County Commissioners. We join them in supporting full PILT funding. [Payments In Lieu Of Taxes to counties with a preponderance of federal land] I’ve offered to work with my Commissioners and other elected officials to create an off-road vehicle park in an area not eligible for Wilderness designation. I’ve brought materials to meetings showing how other communities adjacent to protected Wilderness were able to turn their economy around. Some County

Commissioners may not agree with their conservationist constituents, but mine have definitely been consulted and I'm told that others have as well.

I commend NREPA's lead sponsors, past and present—chief among them the Honorable Carolyn Maloney of New York, the Honorable Chairmen Nick Rahall of West Virginia and Raul Grijalva of Arizona, as well as the Honorable Christopher Shays of Connecticut and the Honorable Peter Kostmayer of Pennsylvania—for not only recognizing that NREPA saves tax dollars while protecting the Wild Northern Rockies that some call America's Serengeti, but also for having the wisdom to know that communities adjacent to NREPA's wilderness will be able to “eat the scenery” for generations to come.

Opponents speaking today are not expressing the views of many of us who live in the ecosystem, and they are definitely not speaking for the wildlife. NREPA is a necessary and immediately doable solution to today's problems. NREPA saves money, creates jobs, and protects wild places that will be there for our children and grandchildren—vast, awe-inspiring places as close to the way God created them as you'll find anywhere in the world in 2009. NREPA benefits local citizens, American taxpayers, and the world. The benefits will begin the day NREPA becomes law and will sustain all of us over the long run, including those currently opposing it.

I'd like to close with the words of two of my neighbors in the ecosystem.

Helena journalist George Ochenski (Missoula Independent 4/30/09):

“If we've learned one thing in the last year, it's that times are changing faster than anyone thought possible. Many of the arguments used against NREPA in the past are no longer applicable in today's world. The benefits of protecting forests, fisheries, watersheds and wildlife, however, are only becoming more important every day.”

And this letter from a resident of a rural Montana community:

Dear Carole:

My name is Marc Cooke and I live in a little town called Stevensville located in the Bitterroot Valley in Montana.

I understand that you do not want motorized vehicles of any type in this proposed wilderness area. I also understand that you do not want a land swap deal to take place.

I live an hour, more or less from the Bob Marshall Wilderness. I sometimes work for a friend who operates an Outfitting business in the “Bob” as we call it.

I cannot imagine coming down a trail with pack animals and guests and hearing a motor or worse yet coming face to face with a Motorcycle or ATV. Not only would it be very dangerous for the guest and me but also for the startled animals.

The last thing I want to hear in the Bob is an engine of any type. It would for me loose [sic] its Soul. In return I (We, future generations) would lose the place to recharge our souls.

I want to thank you for trying to do the correct thing and keep engines out of these areas. I am only one person kinda far from your area but would like to help if I can. Please let me know who to write or what have you. Best wishes and warmest regards, Marc Cooke

From their keyboards to your YES vote.

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