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## Western Elected Officials Testify in Support of Legislation to Release Public Lands from *De Facto* Wilderness Management

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today the House National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee held a [hearing](#) on [H.R. 1581](#), the “*Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011*.” Sponsored by House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (CA-22), this bill would release Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas (WSA) that are not suitable for wilderness designation from continued management as *de facto* wilderness, reverting back to multiple-use instead. It would also terminate Secretarial Order 3310, the Obama Administration’s ‘Wild Lands’ order, with regard to released WSAs and prohibit the Interior Secretary from issuing a national regulation or directive on how these lands will be managed.

“Nearly 43 million acres of land remain under restrictive federal land management policies that enable both the BLM and Forest Service to manage them as though they are wilderness areas, despite the fact that it has been determined that they do not meet the necessary criteria for such a designation. It is unacceptable that these policies continue to be leveraged by overzealous federal land managers as a tool to restrict access for hunters and other public land users. This legislation will allow greater public access and multiple-use of millions of acres of public lands that have no business being placed off limits,” **said National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Chairman Bishop.**

### **What They’re Saying About H.R. 1581:**

#### **Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)**

“Simply put, my common sense bill would release Wilderness Study Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas deemed not suitable for wilderness by the existing agencies so they are no longer needlessly held in regulatory limbo, which denies the American people full and appropriate access to them, and require they be managed for multiple-use. The bill would also return these lands to the local management process, where decisions on what can and can’t occur on them are made by local land managers, communities and stakeholders in and around the areas, consistent with existing environmental protections. ... Allowing these lands to be managed for multiple-use enables local land managers and communities to potentially allow for reasonable resources development, better healthy forest management, more reliable grazing and numerous recreational activities, including motorized sports and increased access for better hunting and fishing. These activities could create jobs and generate new revenue for many rural and outlying communities across the country that depend on visitors to our national forests and public lands.”

**Senator John Barrasso (R-WY)**

“The legislation allows local Americans and stakeholders to work with agency officials to develop management plans that best balance recreation, multiple-use, and conservation. ... This Act is good land management policy. It does not dictate what will or will not happen on the released lands. Rather, it returns management to the respective agencies. It provides them the flexibility to manage our public lands for a multitude of activities. More importantly, it gives local Americans, those who live, work, and play on public lands a voice.”

**Rep. Steve Pearce (R-NM)**

“While I do not necessarily oppose the designation of wilderness in areas that qualify by the strict definitions of the 1964 Act, it is absurd that the federal government continues to treat millions of acres that do not qualify as *de facto* wilderness. ... It makes much more sense to release these WSAs than to just keep them in this constant state of limbo. Releasing them will keep them under federal ownership, and opens them up to the same management practices available on other federal lands. This will allow the various federal agencies to conduct proper land management to prevent the spread of wildfires, and keep these lands healthy for both people and animals to enjoy. Preventing us from releasing these WSAs only keeps us from implementing commonsense solutions that can keep our forests thriving, and maintain thriving habitats that actually benefit wildlife.”

**Michael E. Noel, Utah State Representative District #73**

“I am excited about H.R. 1581 and would like to see it signed into law as it would help settle a this contentious debate over how public lands designated as Wilderness Study Areas are managed in Utah. At present, these WSA are not managed for multiple uses. They are simply put off limits to any type of management. ... Utah doesn’t want the federal government paying us for the loss of taxation that if properly managed could in fact come from these federal lands. I believe Utahans and most westerners just want the federal government to allow the states to management these public lands for multiple use and sustained yield.”

**Hon. Kent Connelly, County Commissioner, Lincoln County, Wyoming**

“The enacting of the *Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011* will enable Forest System lands to be freed from the bureaucratic trap in which they are undeniably held. There are hundreds of thousands of acres of Forest System lands designated as inventoried roadless areas that have not been designated as wilderness and were not recommended for designation as wilderness. Yet, these lands continue to be treated as *de facto* wilderness areas with burdensome restrictions placed on development in order to protect the areas’ ‘roadless characteristics.’ The economic, social, and health consequences to the State of Wyoming are incalculable as our beautiful forests continue to be ravaged by drought, overcrowding, wildfire, and bark beetle epidemics.”

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