

DISSENTING VIEWS ON H.R. 2888

I oppose H.R. 2888 because it needlessly designates approximately 30,000 acres of federal land as wilderness and removes economic opportunities from the devastated Oregon economy. From testimony we learned that much of this land is currently managed in a restrictive manner due to past administrative decisions, not Congressional action, during the Clinton years. Much of this land was previously harvested and there are miles of roads, hardly what could be described as “untrammled by man.” However, proponents would like to designate this as wilderness, taking even more land out of timber production. We have heard substantial testimony about the closing of timber mills in the Northwest due to a lack of land available for production. I am perplexed as to how permanently restricting even more land alleviates the catastrophic unemployment being realized there.

I am primarily concerned with the 6,000 acres of Oregon & California (O&C) lands that were set aside some 70 years ago specifically for the economic benefit of the local communities through timber harvesting. Each acre that is whittled away is an acre that could have been used to pay for another teacher, needed public infrastructure, or even fire fighting equipment.

I offered an amendment to bring some balance to this short-sighted bill that purports to protect land no one claims is facing any risk. The amendment would have required the Federal Government to identify suitable acreage outside of the designation to replace the value of acreage lost with this passage of this legislation. Supporters of the bill argue these O&C lands are too difficult to harvest, that no value will be lost. However, they also acknowledge the fact that the land has been cut in the past, and adjacent lands are still harvested. Additionally, the specific need for the amendment was highlighted in a letter to Members of Congress from the Association of O&C Counties.

Unfortunately for the people in the area who need jobs so they can provide for their families, and for local governments trying to keep the school house open, the Democrat Majority refused to allow a vote on this commonsense amendment as they rushed the bill towards passage.

It remains my hope that the Majority will see past ideological divides and allow a free and open debate on the Floor of the House of Representatives, where I will welcome their support in our effort to provide critically needed opportunities to neglected timber communities.

ROB BISHOP.