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Testimony on H.R. 1581 the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Melissa Simpson. I serve as the Director of Government Affairs for Safari Club International (SCI). I am pleased to be here to share the views of Safari Club International, and the mainstream conservation community, the vast majority of which supports H.R. 1581, the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011.

SCI's missions are the conservation of wildlife, protection of hunting, and education of the public concerning hunting and its use as a conservation tool. SCI believes in the legacy of Teddy Roosevelt and his definition of conservation. President Roosevelt described conservation as meaning "sound development as much as it means protection" and that "natural resources must be used for the benefit of all people." SCI strives to uphold this legacy, encouraging the sustainable use of our natural resources and the expansion of recreational opportunities on public lands where suitable.

For this reason we strongly support H.R. 1581. The legislation would release all Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) that have been evaluated and recommended as not suitable for a wilderness designation by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the U.S. Forest Service. It will release these lands from the most restrictive management, and direct that these areas be managed for multiple-use, including recreation. Between the BLM and the Forest Service over 42 million acres would be opened, immediately resulting in increased access for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.

It is important to emphasize that all of the lands affected by this legislation have been evaluated by the BLM and Forest Service and these agencies have determined that these lands are not suitable for wilderness designation by Congress. Therefore, these lands have been managed under the most restrictive management regime for decades even though the federal land managers disagree with the designation.

Mr. Chairman, one of the main concerns of the sportsmen's community is that by requiring these lands to be managed as wilderness, the BLM and Forest Service are greatly reducing the ability of hunters to access this land. Hunting plays an unquestionably significant role in recreation, wildlife management and conservation throughout our public lands. Hunters developed and implemented the North American model of wildlife conservation, which has been central to the successful efforts to return wildlife to abundant populations in the United States.

Detractors argue that hunters can access these lands by foot, but hunters are understandably reluctant to hunt in areas where any harvested game cannot be readily accessed for transportation out of the field.

From a larger perspective, members of this committee understand that hunters and anglers also contribute the majority of dollars spent on conservation through license fees and excise taxes. The hunting industry also supports local economies, and fuels jobs and economic growth in rural America. The most recent data available shows that hunting and fishing support 1.6 million jobs across the America, and these cherished pastimes directly contribute 76 billion dollars to the economy.

In addition to this direct impact, hunting and fishing create an economic ripple effect of \$192 billion a year. Hunters and anglers keep people working in gas stations, retail, restaurants and hotels. By releasing these lands Congress would be increasing hunting and fishing access and increasing the economic benefit those outdoor sports provide to rural economies.

<http://www.sportsmenslink.org/sites/sportsmenslink.org/files/Bright%20Stars%20of%20the%20Economy.pdf>)

Mr. Chairman, hunters and anglers are also concerned about the impact that the restrictive management of Wilderness Study Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas has on disabled, elderly and youth hunters. These hunters are faced with two additional problems when attempting to access the type of lands that would be released by H.R. 1581.

First, these hunters have a particularly difficult time getting to hunting destinations that are inaccessible due to being located in a Roadless Area. If indeed they are able to access a hunting area located within one of these areas, they have difficulty negotiating the often-demanding terrain without assistance. And of course, they have an even larger problem in attempting to transport harvested game out of the field.

As our population ages it is vital to continue to provide quality hunting opportunities to older and disabled hunters, and to promote youth hunting to grow the next generation of hunters. SCI believes that there are many less restrictive land designations that would be more appropriate for these lands that would allow for increased hunter access and other multiple use activities while protecting them from exploitation.

A prime example of the application these unnecessary restrictions on disabled hunters can be found in the BLM and Forest Service's own Wilderness Access Decision Tool. This tool is to be used by federal land managers to make consistent decisions about the use of wilderness areas by persons with disabilities. This document, which is attached to my written testimony, contains case studies that exemplify how rules should be imposed. One of these case studies centered around a disabled hunting group requesting to use simple carts to help disabled

hunters remove harvested game during hunting trips. The decision document states that this request should be denied as, “a deer cart does not meet the definition of a wheelchair, nor is it a medically prescribed assistive device.” (Wilderness Access Decision Tool at 21)

Even worse, exceptions to allow wheel chairs only apply to persons with approved disabilities, and wheelchairs must be approved for indoor use. (Wilderness Access Decision Tool at 7) This discriminates against elderly or youth hunters who may have a hard time maneuvering through rough terrain but may not technically be considered disabled, thus ineligible for any consideration by land managers. There is no need for these absurd restrictions. Releasing these lands to multiple-use would remove these onerous restrictions on land use and allow disabled, elderly and youth hunters and anglers to enjoy all of our public lands.

SCI members cherish our outdoor heritage. We have worked to bring back game populations from the brink during the 20th Century, and we are proud stewards of the land. Today, all we are asking for is the ability to reasonably access and enjoy our public lands. There are far better ways to preserve treasured hunting lands than to continue a one-size fits all approach that has been rejected by land managers for decades. Land managers can use travel management plans and other land designations that do not impose an undue burden on hunters and recreational interests. The time has come for Congress to act and release these areas that land managers have already designated as not suitable for wilderness.

I thank the subcommittee for addressing an issue that is very important to the sportsmen’s community and to the health of rural economies. We look forward to working with Congress and the agencies to release these lands so that they can be enjoyed by hunters, anglers and other multiple-use activities.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.