

Personal and Professional Background

Brian S. Smith is currently the Managing Partner of Blackfoot River Brewing Company, a craft brewery located in Helena, Montana. Prior to venturing off into private enterprise, he worked as an Economist for the State of Montana for ten years, primarily in the natural resource arena. He holds a B.S. in Business from the University of Maryland and was a graduate student and teaching assistant in Economics at the University of Montana. Brian also proudly served in the United States Air Force as a Linguist and Weapons System Intelligence Analyst. Brian is an avid outdoor recreationist; he is a hunter, fisherman, backpacker, skier, and floater. He has traveled extensively in the Wilderness Areas of Montana and Idaho.

H.R. 980 Testimony

I am a small business owner from Helena, Montana. Prior to starting my business, I worked as an Economist on natural resource issues for the State of Montana. Eleven years ago I followed a dream and with a partner opened a micro brewery. Today, we employ 13 people, we provide health insurance for all of our employees who work greater than 220 hours per week. Additionally, we provide vacation, sick leave, and retirement benefits to every one of our employees, regardless of hours worked.

During the course of doing business, I have the opportunity to speak with people across the State. It is clear that many people choose to live and work in Montana because of its wild, natural surroundings and the recreational opportunities it provides. Economic studies have shown that areas near national parks and wilderness areas have the strongest economies in the Northern Rockies. I know my business will continue to benefit if our wildlands are permanently protected as wilderness.

I use economic thought to help me make business decisions every day. That is to say I am always looking to maximize value for the company, our employees, our customers, and our community. Simply put, if an activity does not create any value, then why do it?

I am of the personal opinion that your job in Congress is similar. It is your job to create and pass legislation that maximizes the wellbeing of all American citizens and maximizes value for our taxpayers.

~~We all know that~~ One of the most important concepts in Economics is that the value of something is largely determined by its supply and demand. Items that are in short supply and high demand, become extremely valuable. With that in mind as the supply of wildlands across the World diminishes, the value of those remaining wildlands increases. This is certainly the case today; wildlands are rapidly disappearing across the World. Designated Wilderness is like a savings account, it protects a precious natural resource for the future when its value may be much higher simply because there are few remaining alternatives.

NREPA provides a formal wilderness designation to the existing roadless lands in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem. These are lands that do not contain much marketable timber due to their low-grade timber quality and inaccessibility. ~~Surrounding these roadless areas exist other areas of greater marketable value. Most of these lands that did at one time contain timber worth getting, to have already been roaded and harvested.~~ One of the reasons these roadless lands still exist in their natural state, is that the cost of building roads to harvest the timber is much greater than the value of the timber itself. If I ran my brewery business like the U.S. Forest Service conducts below market timber sales, I would no longer be in business. It's time for the US taxpayers to stop subsidizing the Forest Service in order to provide below cost timber to the wood products industry. Harvesting timber in roadless areas is fiscally irresponsible and makes no economic sense.

Opponents of this bill will say that it is bad for jobs and the economy. I would argue that this piece of legislation actually creates jobs. The NREPA protects the ecosystem while still allowing for up to 95% of planned harvestable timber to be available for industry. In fact, passage of this bill will create approximately 2,300 high paying reclamation jobs at a time when our citizens are needing them most. I know a lot of people in the construction industry in Montana, and because of the current economic climate, most of those people are currently either unemployed or underemployed. The creation of these new jobs under NREPA will not only help the Montana economy, but will also help and the thousands of other small businesses in the State, like my own. By supporting this visionary piece of legislation, Congress can vote for both Jobs and the Environment.

Other opponents will say that this bill is being pushed by “out-of-staters”, all-the-while forgetting that these lands belong to *all* of the American people. Such criticism to the preservation of wildlands (~~wilderness?~~) is nothing new. Following the creation of Yellowstone NP in 1872, the Helena Gazette stated the following in an editorial opposing the act “We regard the passage of the act as a great blow to the prosperity of the towns of Bozeman and Virginia City...”. Our congressional representatives at the time went on to try to repeal the creation of Yellowstone for 20 more years. Similar comments and actions arose from the creation of Glacier National Park in 1914. Today Americans overwhelmingly support and appreciate these national treasures. Furthermore, I can assure you that communities surrounding these National Parks are greatly dependent on the tourism that they generate.

One of the reasons I believe I have been successful in business is by focusing on the long term rather than the short. The same approach works with NREPA. If our remaining wildlands are developed, they are lost forever. If our wildlands are protected, they will continue to bring value to our citizens and the economy for decades to come. Please make the right decision for our future and vote yes for HR 980.

Thank You.