

Testimony of
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of the

House Natural Resources Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee: I am honored to testify today.

I am a fourth generation Montanan and a third generation practical applicator of academic forest management theory, a logger. I moved back to Montana, after completing college, for two environmental reasons. The natural environment of clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife and beautiful tree shrouded mountains and the cultural environment of rural resource managers.

I soon learned of a third environment that would dictate the health of the natural and cultural environments I love – the political environment.

My county, Lincoln County, Montana, is 80 % federally owned. For the past 20 years I have been thoroughly involved in local, regional and national attempts to make sense of the laws governing the management of the public forest resource that I live in, work in, play in and love. I volunteer as executive director of Communities for a Great Northwest - a group that provides input on forest resource management in our area and has made a decades long commitment to good faith efforts at working in a productive relationship with the forest service.

I helped coordinate the Kootenai Forest Congress - a local group of resource managers, conservationists, and community leaders that developed and worked hard at moving toward a vision of the future for our forest that includes healthy ecosystems and healthy social and economic systems. I currently serve on our local RAC, work with a local stakeholder collaboration group, and I am a twenty-year member of our Grizzly Bear

Community Involvement Team - a broad based group that attempts to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in recovering the grizzly bear in our ecosystem.

While reading over HR1975, one thing kept jumping up at me: environmental justice. The definition of environmental justice is: the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people - regardless of race, ethnicity, income or education level - in environmental decision making. Environmental Justice programs promote the protection of human health and the environment, empowerment via public participation, and the dissemination of relevant information to inform and educate affected communities.

This bill is classic environmental injustice at its worst. The perpetrators of this huge wilderness scheme note in their findings that the people of the Northern Rockies have suffered from histories of 'economic instability and high unemployment rates.' They fail to mention that the record unemployment rates set in the region have come from the actions of an environmental conflict industry that has reduced the timber management of federal lands to one tenth of the growth of timber on federal lands and forced the closure of scores of family owned mills and the loss of thousands of logging jobs since 1990.

For over one hundred years, communities like mine underwent periods of years of recession that tracked with the timber market. But with the total collapse of public land timber management we no longer have periods of recession – we have persistent poverty with permanently closed sawmills. When Mike Garrity of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies did the economic impact study for this bill he failed to mention this fact.

The proponents of this bill also do not mention that on the Kootenai forest a recent study found that 93% of the recreational use of the forest was road access dependent use. This fact is ignored when the proponents say in the findings of the bill that setting aside over a million acres of the area I live in as wilderness will help to sustain the economy through activities on the forest. This finding is simply inaccurate at its best. When we decommission roads we will decommission recreational sales in our town. You can bet on it.

The bill proponents also state that the local economies will thrive with remediation jobs in the forest areas where road decommissioning needs to take place and where forest restoration work needs to be done. What they fail to mention is that these jobs are not sustainable by the letter of this bill for in fact, when the areas recovered are sufficiently de-roaded, they will be included in the wilderness preservation system. Then we will get to rely on the non-existent recreation jobs from the wilderness designation.

Our local groups are currently busy working on solutions to our fuel loaded timberlands that are light on the land and have long term ecological benefit for the specific area being treated. Oftentimes these treatments do not need the use of roads. Sometimes these treatments need the use of existing roads that need brought to modern water quality standards. The treatment of the timber often pays for the maintenance of or the decommissioning of roads. This bill would derail a great deal of our local work on these areas. The work being done in these local groups is the true work of sustainability. The

forests that have grown too thick with time are going to grow back again. Using ever increasingly low impact management techniques and utilizing the biomass in ever more environmentally friendly ways (biofuels?) the future for our rural Northern Rockies communities lies in living with a management regime that protects both their economy and their ecology. This bill falls short on both counts.

The bill proponents also state the age-old and tired argument that by passing this bill, the burden of below cost timber sales will be removed from the public and the tax burden of managing our public lands will be reduced. This flies in the face of what is asked for in the bill. How in the world will a new division of the Forest Service be formed (the National Wildland Recovery Corps) and capitalized with no burden to the taxpayer? How in the world will 6000 miles of road be decommissioned within the wilderness Areas proposed and another unknown number of miles of road be decommissioned in the biological corridors with no cost to the public? At least with timber sales there was some revenue coming back to the public in the form of stumpage. In this bill there is no revenue stream. It is all cost. Cost to the taxpayer and cost to the environment.

There was also no mention that the anti-mining and anti-oil and gas exploration conflict industry has successfully driven scores of resource companies out of the Northern Rockies and into nations such as Venezuela and Bolivia where environmental and employee standards are less than American standards of thirty years ago. Under this bill millions more acres of federal land will permanently be taken off of our domestic radar for getting off of the foreign tit of oil and gas.

It is also interesting that this bill's management regime for the Biological Corridors states that no 'even aged management of timber will be used.' And yet, in the area I come from – the Cabinet/Yaak Ecosystem - much of our area and a great deal of what they propose for wilderness and biological corridors and ultimately wilderness is the mature, single age class, lodgepole remnants of the largest fire in North America history – the 1910 blaze. That fire burned 3,000,000 acres in two days and the resulting 3,000,000 acres of single age class regrowth is ready to regenerate.

In fact, the 1998 GAO Study on Forest Health stated that the single biggest threat to the forest of the inland west were single event, catastrophically huge, catastrophically hot stand destroying, watershed destroying wildfires. Since 1998 we have seen this to be true and have watched as our forests endangered species habitat has been burned and watersheds as large as the one serving the city of Denver have been turned to ashes. Under this legislation, the proponents are suggesting that those of us who live in and around these areas where years of fire suppression have left us with overstocked, unhealthy forests should pretend that we have no responsible methods of restoring the health of the land except for set asides in the wilderness system. In other words, we should be satisfied with allowing the fires we know to be imminent to blast out of the 'protected' areas and into our living areas.

The GAO report mapped the areas of the Northern Rockies that had the greatest risk of loss to fire in the near future. Many of the areas suggested for Wilderness in this act or

for protection as Connecting Corridors and eventual wilderness or for Remediation areas and eventual wilderness are included in the 'high risk' areas. The proponents would have us believe that setting these acres aside for management by fire is better for our wildlife, better for our watersheds, better for our airsheds, better for us.

I disagree. Interestingly, these fires by-and-large use single age class management – sometimes 100,000 acres at a time.

I also believe that our water should be adjudicated at the state level and that the potential for taking of water as stated in Section 210 of this bill is untenable. I can envision a flurry of lawsuits aimed at the state of Montana and the federal government for not adjudicating 'enough' water for the purpose of this act – and the deciding jurisdiction being the 9th Circuit. This, Mr. Chairman, is a lawyers dream and a state's rights nightmare.

In fact, it is all of these facts from the impacted areas that frame the reasons that not one of the elected Representatives from the areas suggested for wilderness in this act are sponsors of the act. Those who live closest to the realities of the proposed set asides know that there are better options for our forests, our grasslands, our 'habitat' than those from thousands of miles away can envision.

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1990 sustainability was defined as "providing for humankind today in a manner that does not compromise the ability of future generations to do the same." I concur. They went further, however, and said that sustainability was going to be defined and defended on a local landscape level with the indigenous population of stakeholders at the table of debate. Indigenous is not a term that is exclusive to people of color in Zimbabwe. It means local.

This bill undermines the local efforts communities throughout the Northern Rockies are working on to find a sustainable future. It acts as a scud missile flying in from afar to smack right down in the table of trust that has been built between the resource community and the conservation community.

I know that a lot of the sponsors of this bill are well intentioned. They believe that they are doing the 'right' thing and believe that since the land at issue is public land they have a right to weigh in on behalf of their constituents. I also have a vested interest in the federally funded housing projects in places like the Bronx and have seen the stories of their decline into criminal infested enclaves over the last several decades. However, since I know very little about urban housing and the issues surrounding that complex issue, I would no sooner weigh in with a sledge hammer of a piece of legislation that mandated management of those projects than I would attempt to fly. I just wouldn't do it. It wouldn't be right. The local people would have to have a larger say in the management of those places than I could ever have.

Again, the definition of environmental justice is: the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, income or education level—in

environmental decision making. This bill and the way it has been promoted has none of these traits and the local people of the Northern Rockies object to the environmental injustice of people from outside of our area mandating management regimes that ignore the realities we face on the ground as we attempt to define and defend our sustainability. I encourage you to give it the red light it deserves – not a green light just because it is politically possible to steamroll us.