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Statement of

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2nd District, Nevada

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests & Public Lands
H.R. 3377, Pine Forest Range Recreational Enhancement Act
March 8, 2012

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grajlava, and fellow members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing today on H.R. 3377, the Pine Forest Range Recreational Enhancement Act. I was pleased to introduce this legislation as one of my initial acts after being elected to represent Nevada's 2nd District, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about it today.

My bill is the result of the collaborative work of the Pine Forest Working Group, a group of local citizens from northern Nevada. It is a balanced proposal to end the management of the Blue Lakes and Alder Creek WSAs as "de facto" wilderness, and instead tailor the management of these areas to the needs of local communities. H.R. 3377 would designate as Wilderness roughly 26,000 acres made up of the Blue Lakes and Alder Creek Wilderness Study Areas, or "WSA's," release some 1,000 acres of the Alder Creek WSA for multiple use management, and authorize land exchanges. In fact, this bill will slightly increase additional access to this area do to the land exchanges. It has the unanimous support of the Humboldt County Commission, as well as working group members representing sportsmen, off-highway vehicle users, ranchers, the Humboldt County Administrator, Nevada Department of Wildlife, guides and outfitters, wilderness advocates, mining interests, and the Humboldt County - University of Nevada Extension Agent. The process by which the recommendations were developed has received the endorsement of the 2011 Nevada State Legislature and the Nevada Association of Counties.

Coming from a state with as much public land as Nevada has, I have seen how controversial public land management decisions can be—particularly those involving Wilderness designations. The kind of consensus that was developed by my constituents in Humboldt County through the Pine Forest Working Group is rare, and laudable.

The collaborative effort began late in 2009 when the Humboldt County Commission sanctioned a review process for the area's WSAs. Throughout 2010, a series of stakeholder meetings and field trips were held, after which the working group sat down together to develop its recommendations for how the areas should be managed. By the end of 2010, the recommendations received the unanimous support of the Humboldt County Commission. During 2011, the recommendations were turned into the legislative proposal that became H.R. 3377.

The bill would ensure that lands are managed in a way that meets the needs of the local community and stakeholders, including access for fishing and hunting, camping, and other outdoor recreation, as well as fire management. It keeps open the roads that are important to off-highway vehicle users. It conserves the Pine Forest's unique outdoor values for future generations. Hunters will always have a place in the Pine Forest to hunt mule deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, chukar partridge, and other game. The Blue Lakes complex and both Onion Valley and Knott Creek reservoirs will continue to be a destination for the thousands of anglers who visit each summer and fall.

I will close with a quote from Annie Drake Krachaw, a Winnemucca resident and member of a family that ranches in the area. Of the working group process, she said, "Going in, I think there was a level of skepticism, but most of us, the ranchers and the recreationalists and the government entities, like the BLM, have all been respectful of each other. If we can have our interests respected and protected—and for ranchers that's access to the land and water—then it's in the best interests of everyone. That can take some extra effort, but it's worth it, because we all want to see the land protected."

H.R. 3377 is a testament to what can be accomplished when people are focused and committed to a desirable outcome for all. The working group had its disagreements, but it worked through them and came to a consensus. I am proud of the work that was done by my constituents in Humboldt County, and I'm honored to bring this legislation before the subcommittee today. Thank you for receiving my testimony; I look forward to working with you to move H.R. 3377 forward and answering any questions you may have.