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Testimony on H.R. 1581
July 26, 2011

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on H.R. 1581. It is more than ten years since I left office as Secretary of the Interior, and this is the first time that I have accepted an invitation to testify on pending legislation.

I have accepted your invitation today because this bill, H.R. 1581, is not just another run-of-the-mill proposal. H.R. 1581 is the most radical, overreaching attempt to dismantle the architecture of our public land laws that has been proposed in my lifetime. This bill must not gather momentum in the legislative backwaters of yet another routine committee hearing. It needs to be brought out into the sunlight of extended public discussion so that the American people can see and clearly understand the threat it poses to our public land heritage.

Among other provisions, H.R. 1581 would eliminate existing protections for more than 55 million acres of land within our National Forests. Further, this legislation would eliminate existing protection, provided under the Federal Land Management Act and the Wilderness Act, for nearly 7 million acres of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

These lands, which together equal an area nearly the size of the entire state of Michigan would be released from protection by H.R. 1581. Were this legislation to become law, these lands would immediately lose their existing protection, to become available for industrial timber cutting and oil and gas exploitation. Simply put, this legislation trades protection of wildlife habitat, clean water, and clean air for corporate profits. It is nothing more than a giveaway of our great outdoors.

BLM-managed Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs)

The Wilderness Act is perhaps the single greatest achievement in America's long and illustrious history of public lands management. The Wilderness Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 373 to 1, set in motion a unique process that charged federal land management agencies with assessing public lands to identify which lands should be preserved in perpetuity as federally protected Wilderness. The Wilderness Act defines Wilderness as:

"in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.

An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent

improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

The Wilderness Act, as passed by Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, did not originally apply to the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 1976 Congress rectified this oversight with passage of FLPMA which directed the BLM to review its land holdings in accordance with the Wilderness Act. Areas identified as possessing the qualities outlined in the Wilderness Act were to be identified and managed as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) by the BLM until such time as Congress decides how these lands should be managed long term.

The enduring success of the Wilderness Act, its public acceptance, and the fact that it has served our country well for nearly a half century is, in my judgment, due in no small part to the manner in which it incorporates the best aspects of our Federal-state system of government.

The Wilderness Act (and FLPMA) delegated to the land management agencies the task of defining and mapping areas eligible for wilderness consideration. The Act, however, reserves to Congress the ultimate authority to designate those areas identified by the agency as wilderness or to release eligible lands from further consideration. Wilderness bills generally originate with the Congressional delegation from the state in which the lands are located. This process assures that all stakeholders with an interest in the enormous variety of lands and resources on our public lands, have a voice in how these lands are managed.

Since enactment of the Wilderness Act some 155 wilderness bills, many of them designating multiple wilderness areas, have been approved by Congress. Some of these bills released areas from further study, while others did not. Some bills passed without controversy; others were enacted only after prolonged debate.

While this process can be slow and cumbersome, it has produced a resource of permanently protected wilderness that is nothing short of a national treasure.

Some days ago, I looked over a list of the remaining Wilderness Study Areas, and I noticed that my State of Arizona has largely completed the process of designating and releasing Wilderness Study Areas. Serious discussions about the future of Arizona's BLM lands began some thirty years ago, during my tenure as Governor. Two members of Congress, Senator Barry Goldwater and Representative Morris Udall led the process. Extensive consultations among environmental groups, sportsmen groups, as well as resource users (led by the Arizona mining industry), extended for several years,

ultimately resulting in several state-wide wilderness bills which finally determined the status of most wilderness study areas.

It is this process, sanctioned by more than forty years of success, that HR 1581 proposes to destroy. Instead of locally-driven processes that result in well-supported decisions, this legislation imposes a preemptive federal decision, imposed on all states and areas, without participation of local, state, and national stakeholders.

National Forest Roadless Areas

In addition to destroying existing protections for BLM-managed Wilderness Study Areas, H.R. 1581 also proposes to hand over more than 55 million acres of our most pristine National Forest areas for industrial logging and oil and gas exploitation. H.R. 1581 would facilitate this giveaway of our great outdoors by means of a blanket repeal of the forest protection policy established by the Clinton Administration.

As a member of that administration, I can tell you that the reason the National Forest Roadless Rule was proposed by the Clinton Administration is both simple and compelling. Over the last century, the timber industry has taken more than its share from our national forests. More than half of the land managed by the Forest Service has already been handed over to timber interests.

Growing up in one of the largest of western logging communities, I personally witnessed this process over my lifetime as most of the great old growth ponderosa forests of the Coconino Plateau were successively destroyed by road building and clear cutting. I watched as watersheds were decimated, as wildlife shrank to the margins, and the great yellow belly pine forests were reduced to fragments on the sides of inaccessible canyons and mountainsides.

Today, only about 20 percent of our National Forests are included within established wilderness areas. What little remains of our old growth forests outside of these wilderness areas are the areas now demarcated as Roadless Areas, which together amount to only about 58 million acres (30% of the entire base of our National Forest System).

The question posed by H.R. 1581 is simply this: Do the American people want to allow these last remaining areas to be delivered over to the industrial timber and oil and gas industries, or should we take this last chance to protect what is left?

In 2000 the Clinton Administration put forth the proposed rule on the management of our roadless national forest lands for consideration by the American people. The result was the most extensive and transparent rule making process in history. More than 23,000 people attended over 400 hearings, and the Forest Service received well over 1 million comments. Many governors provided public support of the initiative as well. On the basis of this public process, the policy that provides protection for the Forest Service's roadless areas was adopted.

Opening areas to new road construction, as proposed by HR 1581, has myriad negative effects. Roads cause habitat fragmentation impacts on big game species and degrade backcountry hunting opportunities. The hunting experiences described by Theodore Roosevelt in the Grand Canyon region are no longer available in many of today's autumn forests.

In addition to destroying backcountry hunting and fishing opportunities, H.R. 1581 would also destroy the forest health and watershed protection benefits of roadless areas. Further, the inverse relationship between water quality and road density is widely documented. Downstream communities benefit directly from intact watersheds. H.R. 1581 will cost downstream communities money as sediment loads increase and water quality deteriorates.

Claims that more road building will reduce the incidence of destructive wild fires are not supported by the facts. Studies show that logging of old growth actually increases fire risk as a result of the scattering of fine fuels and slash on the forest floor. And road building increases the amount of casual traffic which in turn increases the incidence of human caused fires.

The Clinton Administration, as a result of my urging, recognized that some thinning of undergrowth, including by mechanical means, is a necessary aspect of ecological restoration. The Roadless Rule specifically allows for access necessary for fire reduction and ecological restoration.

Claims that the Roadless Rule discourages public access are likewise untrue. To the contrary, by excluding industrial logging and road building for oil and gas development, this policy provides a clear management direction to the agency that on these select lands, other public, sustainable uses have priority. These uses include, but are certainly not limited to wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, and protection of watersheds for downstream communities. And motorized recreation is not precluded by the Rule.

Over the years road building has become part of the institutional DNA of the Forest Service. Today, there are over 348,000 miles of roads in our National Forests. This represents nearly ten times the mileage in the entire Interstate Highway System. The Forest Service road maintenance backlog is now approaching $10 billion. The Roadless Rule both ensures that we leave some vestiges of our primordial forests and that we do not load still more costs onto the Forest Service.

Summary

H.R. 1581 would destroy the protections established by the Roadless rule; it would degrade backcountry hunting and fishing opportunities, increase fire risk, destroy recreation economies, impose increased water treatment costs, and add to the Forest

Service's maintenance backlog. H.R. 1581 would terminate time honored and successful Wilderness Act procedures for lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

H.R. 1581 should be entitled "The Great Giveaway". The only beneficiaries of this legislation would be industrial timber and oil and gas corporations. The losers will be the American public, our children and grandchildren and generations to come.

I urge you to reject this legislation.