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Testimony on Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation on Public Lands
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My name is Thomas Crimmins, I'm a retired Forest Service Official and I live in Hayden Lake, ID. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to offer my perspective on H.R. 1581, the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011.

In short, I support the legislation and ask you to do the same. The legislation would release all Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) that have been evaluated and not recommended as suitable for wilderness by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the U.S. Forest Service. It will reduce restrictive management practices and direct that these areas be managed for multiple use, including recreation.

As is stands, the BLM currently restricts activity on nearly 7 million acres of WSAs despite the fact the BLM itself has already determined these areas are not suitable for wilderness designation by Congress. The situation with the Forest Service is even worse, as access is restricted to over 36 million acres of IRAs that have been deemed unsuitable for ultimate designation as wilderness.

I worked for the US Forest Service for 32 years from 1966 to 1998. During my career, I was involved with the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) process on several forests in California. Throughout the process, I and other managers operated under the expectation that areas ultimately deemed as unsuitable for wilderness designation would be released. This has not been the case. Instead access to these areas continues to be restricted, ostensibly to protect the wilderness characteristics of areas that have been evaluated by the respective agency to be unsuitable for designation as wilderness. This doesn't make sense.

I would like to provide a little background on my experiences that will shed some light on how we got here.

From 1973 to 1977, I worked on the Mendocino National Forest on the Forest Planning Team. One of our tasks was to complete an evaluation of the Snow Mountain area to determine if it should be recommended for Wilderness designation. This area had been identified during the RARE I process. In 1977, the report had been completed and was ready for distribution when we were told to hold the report because we had to go back and determine if additional areas should have been included in the analysis area. This was the beginning of the RARE II process.

In 1977, I transferred to the Cannell Meadow Ranger District on the Sequoia National Forest. As a Resource Officer, I was included on a team that was tasked with identifying possible new areas that should be analyzed for Wilderness consideration.

The direction for the process came from Forest Service headquarters here in D.C. The intent of the process was to identify any and all areas that could potentially be considered for Wilderness designation and then, **once and for all**, make recommendations for areas that should be considered for Wilderness designations and areas that should be managed for multiple use. This would allow the agency to move forward with its mission to manage the National Forests.

We were asked to include any area that did not have evidence of past logging activities and did not include any roads constructed with mechanized equipment. As we worked on the maps we would identify potential areas and where questions existed we would go into the field to identify the specific boundaries. During these site visits we would find areas that we knew would not meet the criteria for Wilderness but that did meet the criteria for evaluation and we would include them in the identified area because the subsequent evaluation would ultimately resolve the issues. The evaluations were completed and Wilderness recommendations were developed. Shortly thereafter, the whole process was back in court.

In 1984, Congress was considering the California Wilderness Act. During that process, Senator Cranston had supported a specific acreage for designation which was more than recommended by the Forest Service and Representative Bill Thomas from the Bakersfield area was recommending designation of significantly less acreage. The final compromise that moved

forward was halfway between the two proposals and included areas that did not meet Wilderness criteria.

When the bill was ultimately enacted into law, we went out and closed gates on roads and posted Domeland Wilderness boundaries on areas that had been used for years for dispersed camping with campers and motorhomes because their use had occurred on roads that had never been constructed with mechanized equipment but the areas had been included in the analysis process. In addition to Wilderness designation, the Act identified several areas for further planning or special consideration. While not exactly what we had envisioned, the final Act seemed to be reasonable, particularly since it included the following release language for the remaining areas:

Section 111(a)(4) areas in the State of California reviewed in such final environmental statement or referenced in subsection (d) and not designated as wilderness or planning areas by this title or remaining in further planning as referenced in [sic] subsection (e) upon enactment of this title shall be managed for multiple use in accordance with land management plans pursuant to section 6 of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976: Provided, That such areas need not be managed for the purpose of protecting their suitability for wilderness designation prior to or during revision of the land management plans;

We believed that we would now have the ability to move forward with management of the remaining areas. But, it was not to be.

Almost before the ink dried on the President's signature, several environmental organizations challenged the Forest Service on the management of the released areas and the agency agreed to complete an Environmental Impact Statement before any management entries would be made into these areas. Thus, the agency returned to the "analysis paralysis" that exists today. To avoid extra work and conflict associated with management of the "roadless areas" the agency simply tried to manage around them until Forest Planning and the accompanying EIS were completed.

During each iteration of Forest Planning the agency has tried to placate the environmental community by identifying more acreage for wilderness designation and in each case, they have failed to get the remaining areas released back into multiple use management. Each attempt has been met with litigation and another round of analysis or rulemaking.

That is why I am here to support passage of H.R. 1581. This bill will finally take the agency to where it should have been with the completion of the RARE II analysis process. It will allow the Forest Service to responsibly manage these lands that did not and do not qualify for Wilderness designation. It is a bill whose time has come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.