

**Testimony Of  
Congressman Kevin McCarthy  
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Legislative Hearing On  
H.R. 1581, “Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011”  
July 26, 2011**

Well thank you Chairman Bishop, thank you for holding this legislative hearing.

Right now, the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service administers over 400 million acres of land in the United States. Now what does that mean? 45 percent of all of California, almost 60 percent of Utah and nearly 85 percent of Nevada are owned by the Federal government. This means the government has significant control over how lands in our state are used, what is done on them and how the American people can access and enjoy them.

Starting in 1960, Congress enacted several laws to require that millions of acres under Federal control be “administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.” In other words, public lands has to be just that – open to the public.

However, today there are over 42 million acres of Wilderness Study Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas, which have been deemed unsuitable for wilderness by BLM and the Forest Service, respectively. Because of the current law and regulations, these lands must be managed essentially as if they are Wilderness Areas – the most restrictive management practice, which prohibits most activities, and denies Americans the ability to fully and appropriately enjoy their public lands.

These lands remain under lock and key until Congress chooses to make them Wilderness Areas or release them for multiple-use. A decision that has been pending for decades.

Simply put, my common sense bill would release Wilderness Study Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas deemed not suitable for wilderness by the existing agencies so they are no longer needlessly held in regulatory limbo, which denies the American people full and appropriate access to them, and require they be managed for multiple-use. The bill would also return these lands to the local management process, where decisions on what and can’t occur on them are made by local land managers, communities and stakeholders in and around the areas, consistent with existing environmental protections.

Why is this bill important?

Allowing these lands to be managed for multiple-use enables local land managers and communities to potentially allow for reasonable resources development, better healthy forest management, more reliable grazing and numerous recreational activities, including motorized sports and increased access for better hunting and fishing. These activities could create jobs and generate new revenue for many rural and outlying communities across the country that depend on visitors to our national forests and public lands.

In addition, opening up these lands would make it much easier to clear fallen and rotten trees and underbrush, reducing the danger of the out-of-control wildfires that have been prevalent in California and around the nation in recent years.

Where I represent, there are 11 Wilderness Study Areas in which more than 18,000 acres have been deemed unsuitable for wilderness. There are seven roadless areas within the Sequoia National Forest around Lake Isabella, with over 200,000 acres that have been recommended not suitable for wilderness. Actively enjoying the land through recreational activities benefit our local communities across the West.

In conclusion, all this bill does is to act on the recommendations of BLM and the Forest Service to release a small percentage of the 400 plus million acres these agencies are responsible for, which have been deemed unsuitable.

As President Theodore Roosevelt, one of the greatest champions for our natural wonders, said, "Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land."

I'm honored today to have two constituents that are going to testify later. Chris Horgan and Dave Freeland, and they will tell you from firsthand, being a ranger, being a committed conservationist that can help protect. As you narrow down the land that you open up you actually destroy more land. Because those who are able to enjoy it have a smaller area and trample over more. What this bill does takes the studies that this Congress paid for, by the BLM and the Forest Service, and they actually take the study and apply them to what they said would be the best outcome; while protecting the local environment by having the locals in control. If you've ever been to California, if you've ever watched the news and you see the out-of-control fires. We know we can have a better way. We know we can open it up for more people to enjoy. That was the intent, from the beginning in the 1960s of opening up these lands. And I yield back.