

Statement of Martha McClure
Supervisor, Del Norte County

On H.R. 233, the Northern California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act
Before the United States House of Representatives
Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Forests
July 14, 2005

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Martha McClure and I am the Supervisor for Del Norte County's Second District. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act.

I believe Del Norte County is one of the most spectacular regions in California. From our redwood parks, to our scenic coastline, to the turquoise waters of the Smith River, the scenic beauty of our county is unparalleled. It is this beauty that attracts thousands of visitors every year and is presently causing more and more people to call our county their home.

Most of our natural treasures are on state or federal land and we must carefully weigh any legislation that affects our county's land base to make absolutely sure it considers the impacts to our residents and addresses their concerns. With HR 233, Congressman Thompson has clearly considered these issues and has done a thorough job of seeking local input and addressing concerns. Let me describe how.

As a public servant I am committed to thoroughly investigating issues important to my community and striving for consensus—or at least compromise—whenever possible. When the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 against this bill in March of this year, people present at the vote voiced concerns about a potential loss of tax revenue, a decrease in the area open to logging, the closure of roads and other vehicle routes, and of worsening fire danger. I voted in support. To investigate these issues head on and to separate myth from fact, I organized a community working group composed of people representing timber interests, off-road vehicle enthusiasts, hunters and anglers, local business people, elected officials and others members of the Board of Supervisors. Most of the people participating in the committee possessed an intimate familiarity with the Smith River National Recreation Area, the portion of the county most affected by H.R. 233.

We invited representatives from Congressman Thompson's office and other bill proponents to meet with the working group and explain in detail what the proposed legislation would and would not do. We also asked the Forest Service to provide an impartial analysis of H.R. 233's impact if passed. In the weeks that followed this frank and at times spirited meeting, the working group then toured all of the areas proposed in the Smith River NRA which was of paramount importance to the group. I think it is fair to say that the meeting and the tour allayed many of the concerns about the legislation that had been voiced by most participants. I think the meetings proved to most participants' satisfaction that Congressman Thompson's bill would:

- Not designate areas with major recreation or resource conflicts as wilderness.
- Not remove land from the local property tax base as only federal lands are included.
- Not close any legal roads or authorized off-road vehicle routes.
- Not impact the timber industry or the Smith River NRA's existing logging program, and
- Not hamper the ability of the Forest Service to either suppress fire or manage fuels before fires start.

Even after these concerns were dispelled, Congressman Thompson went the extra mile to ensure that as many people as possible were happy with H.R. 233. For example, in response to issues raised by the working group, he agreed to remove several portions of the proposed wilderness additions in the Smith River NRA that could potentially be managed for timber production or aggressive fuels reduction, and he adjusted other boundaries to accommodate roadside hunter camps and to allow for the possibility of new road construction in two areas.

The new round of consultations and subsequent adjustments is just another example of Congressman Thompson's desire to listen to and address local concerns. I commend him for his efforts to protect Del Norte County's natural heritage using such an inclusive process.

Now I would like to describe what H.R. 233 will do for Del Norte County. The bill will add five additions to the existing Siskiyou Wilderness encompassing roughly 36,000 acres. The proposed additions are in world-class watersheds for salmon and steelhead trout and contain an amazing variety of plant and animal life. Wilderness designation will give the areas inside of the Smith River NRA an additional and guaranteed layer of protection without causing any loss of public access.

These scenic landscapes are a critical economic and recreational resource. They produce water for domestic and

agricultural use, fish and wildlife for the countless hunters, anglers, birders and others who live in or visit our county every year, and they serve as the spectacular backdrop that makes Del Norte County a great place to reside and recreate.

Because H.R. 233 will maintain the recreational and economic values provided by these areas, many Del Norte County residents enthusiastically support this bill. They understand very well what wilderness does and does not do, and they believe, as I do, that places included in H.R. 233 would make outstanding additions to the federal wilderness system. I would now like to submit for the record a petition of over 800 Del Norte County supporters and letters from Del Norte Supervisor Sarah Samples, Del Norte County Assessor Gerald D. Cochran, Mayor of Crescent City Dennis Burns, Crescent City Councilor Irene Tyne, and Crescent City City Clerk Diane Nickerson, all stating their support for this legislation.

I firmly believe that as a result of Congressman Thompson's responsiveness to the concerns raised by local interests and the importance of the areas proposed as wilderness, H.R. 233 is a win-win for our county, and I hope you will all join me in supporting it, and pass this important bill.