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H.R. 3440 "Recreational Shooting Protection Act" and H.R. 919 "Mohave Valley Land Conveyance Act"  
January 24, 2012  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest, and Public Lands  
House Natural Resources Committee

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear today in support of enactment of H.R. 3440 and H.R. 919, two bills that are necessary for the present and future protection and enhancement of recreational shooting on federal public lands.

Recreational shooting is a historic, traditional and legitimate activity on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Thousands of NRA's members and unaffiliated hunters and shooters depend upon informal and formal places to shoot on BLM lands, especially in the western states where their communities are surrounded by federal lands.

People need places to go not only for the sheer enjoyment of target shooting, but also to teach family members and friends the safe and responsible use of firearms. Hunters need places to practice marksmanship skills and to sight-in their hunting rifles.

In its most recent management plan for a national monument, the BLM acknowledged that the need for places to shoot is growing as the interest in this recreational activity expands, but that urban encroachment on private lands is making it difficult to find places to target shoot. The plan noted that the population growth and subsequent urbanization of the American West has caused edges of property to become closer, the outskirts of communities more crowded, remote areas fewer, and closures to recreational shooting more common.

In response to these demographic changes, the BLM's preferred alternative in the management plan for the Sonoran Desert National Monument (AZ) is to close the entire 500,000-acre monument to recreational shooting. The release of the Sonoran Desert plan followed on the heels of BLM's announcement that it was intending to close the entire Ironwood Forest National Monument (AZ) to recreational shooting.

H.R. 3440 is needed to stop this progression of monument closures by the BLM. There is no restriction against recreational shooting in any Act that has designated specific BLM lands as national monuments. However, the BLM has taken it upon itself to declare that recreational shooting should be excluded from national monuments.

BLM managers have been open about this discriminatory and anti-gun attitude in the press. The Ironwood Forest manager stated that closing the monument was "an appropriate management choice." The Sonoran Desert manager told the press that "The monument's not an appropriate place to have recreational target shooting." Both statements were made during the public comment period which not

only prejudiced the review process, but signaled that monument closure was a conclusion BLM intended to reach regardless of public comment received. In neither management plan was consideration given to leaving open any of the scores of sites that had long been used by target shooters.

The Ironwood Forest and the Sonoran Desert are just two national monuments that BLM has closed. Excluding Sonoran Desert which is still in the planning stage, the BLM has closed nearly 1.3 million acres to the shooting public in recent years.

The BLM has stated that the designation of a national monument requires a greater level of resource protection. But resource protection is not the real issue. The real issue is that the BLM is choosing not to recognize and manage shooting as a legitimate recreational activity and is using the designation of national monument as a means to escape this management responsibility.

Safety has also been used as an excuse for closures. In justifying the closure of Ironwood Forest, a BLM spokesperson said that the agency's desire was to promote a safe environment for all visitors. This statement was made in spite of the incontrovertible fact that recreational shooting has one of the lowest incidents of injuries and deaths of any recreational activity conducted on public lands.

Target shooters would also like to recreate in a safe environment, but no environment can be safe for any visitor unless BLM steps up to its management responsibilities. In the face of a documented need to find safe places for the public to shoot, BLM's response is to be an advocate for more closure.

The BLM justifies closures by stating that there are millions of acres of public lands remaining open for target shooting. However, none of the monument plans has ever evaluated the impact of land closures on access (travel distance and roads) and opportunities for the displaced shooters. None of the plans has ever analyzed the impact of forcing shooters onto other lands and how the increase in shooters would affect the safe use of sites elsewhere.

It is clear that the BLM is using the designation of national monument to eliminate a recreational activity it does not want to manage. In my opinion, the BLM is keeping other lands open to recreational shooting until such time as it can find an excuse or opportunity to close them. Right now, the agency believes that national monument designation gives them carte blanche to close vast acreages to recreational shooting.

Closing public lands to shooters thrusts management responsibilities upon the states and other federal land agencies to respond to what the BLM so pointedly acknowledges as the need to find places to accommodate the growing number of people who enjoy target shooting. H.R. 3440 is necessary to end BLM's prejudicial treatment of recreational shooting and to manage this recreational activity with the same attention it gives to all other recreational activities on public lands.

In turning to H.R. 919, the NRA fully supports the legislative transfer of certain BLM-managed lands in Mojave County to the Arizona Game and Fish Department for the purpose of building a public shooting facility. This will not be the first time that a transfer of BLM lands for such purpose has been legislated by Congress. Congress previously transferred 3,000 acres of BLM land to Clark County, NV to create a

shooting park. It has been 14 years since the community of Bullhead City lost its shooting range. The required NEPA work has been completed on the new site. H.R. 919 is intended to get the spade in the ground to build the much-needed shooting range and the NRA supports the sponsor's intent to make that happen.

This concludes my remarks. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify on two bills of importance to hunters and recreational shooters.