

**Statement of  
Carl Rountree, Assistant Director  
National Landscape Conservation System and Community Partnerships  
Bureau of Land Management  
Department of the Interior  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands & Environmental Regulations  
H.R. 1025, Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act  
July 23, 2013**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on H.R. 1025, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act. The Department supports H.R. 1025 as it applies to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding lands within the National Forest System. We look forward to working with the sponsors and the Committee on minor modifications to the legislation.

**Background**

The proposed 350,000-acre Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area (NCA) is one of the most biologically diverse regions in northern California. The area is an outdoor wonderland, rich in natural and cultural features. Visitors can enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, backpacking, whitewater rafting, camping, rock climbing, and kayaking.

Located less than one hundred miles from the Sacramento and San Francisco metropolitan regions, the proposed NCA stretches from Lake Berryessa in the south to the majestic Snow Mountain Wilderness in the north and encompasses the remote Cache Creek Wilderness. The ease of access, minimal travel time, and proximity to major population centers of the Central Valley and the Bay Area make this rugged area a “backyard destination” for approximately ten million people.

The biological richness of the region is unlike any found in California. The landscape rises from near sea level in the south to over 7,000 feet in the north, supporting such diverse ecosystems as the blue oak woodlands near Putah Creek in the south and the sub-alpine habitat within the Snow Mountain Wilderness. The proposed NCA is also home to a wide variety of native and rare plants such as Sargent's cypress and serpentine willow and provides habitat for dozens of iconic California birds and animals including bald and golden eagles, black bears, mountain lions and herds of wild tule elk.

**H.R. 1025**

H.R. 1025 would designate nearly 350,000 acres of federal land in northern California as the Berryessa Snow Mountain NCA, primarily in Lake, Napa, and Yolo Counties. The proposed NCA would also include federal land in Mendocino and Solano Counties. Approximately 180,000 acres are managed by the Forest Service, 141,000 acres by the BLM, and 28,000 acres by Reclamation.

Each of the NCAs designated by Congress and managed by the BLM are unique. However, these designations typically have certain critical elements in common, including withdrawal from the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws; limiting off-highway vehicles to roads and trails designated for their use; and language that charges the Secretary of the Interior with allowing only those uses that further the conservation purposes for which the unit is established. Furthermore, these Congressional designations should not diminish the protections that currently apply to the lands. This bill honors these principles, and we support the NCA's designation as it applies to lands managed by the Department of the Interior.

A central part of the area covered by the proposed Berryessa Snow Mountain NCA will be Lake Berryessa, impounded by Reclamation's Monticello Dam, which is the principal feature of the federal Solano Project. The Solano Project is operated for multiple purposes, with operations and maintenance responsibility on the project provided pursuant to an Operation, Maintenance and Replacement contract between Reclamation and the Solano County Water Agency. Because of the multi-purpose nature of the Solano Project, and the multiple beneficiaries it serves, Reclamation supports the reference in Section 5(a)(1) to the Reclamation Act of 1902, and its relevance to the management responsibilities on Reclamation at Lake Berryessa. Reclamation also supports language in Section 7 of HR 1025 stating that nothing in the act modifies, changes, or supersedes any contract or agreement approved or administered by the Bureau of Reclamation or Solano County Water Agency or their contractor and Solano Irrigation District. As a keystone for outdoor recreation within the NCA, Reclamation would like to ensure that Lake Berryessa continues to be managed for a diverse range of recreation opportunities as provided for in Reclamation's 2006 Record of Decision for the Lake Berryessa Visitor Services Plan.

Section 3(c) of H.R. 1025 does not have a complete map reference. It is our understanding that the sponsor intends to reference a map dated February 21, 2013 and titled Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area created by the BLM for Representative Thompson at his request. It is this map that informs our position on the legislation.

The BLM would like the opportunity to consider possible minor boundary modifications for manageability. Additionally, we recommend language to provide for BLM land tenure adjustments, if they further the protective purposes for which the NCA is designated. Finally, we would like the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on other more minor and technical amendments.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 1025 the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act.

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H.R.433, Pine Forest Range Recreation Enhancement Act  
July 23, 2013**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on H.R. 433, the Pine Forest Range Recreation Enhancement Act. The Department of the Interior supports H.R. 433, which designates the Pine Forest Range Wilderness in Humboldt County, Nevada, on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). We urge the Congress to move swiftly to pass this bill.

It is gratifying to see Congress moving to protect this area that was highlighted in Secretary Salazar's November 2011 *Preliminary Report on BLM Lands Deserving Protection as National Conservation Areas, Wilderness or Other Conservation Designations*. There is a long history of bipartisan support in Congress for the conservation of America's special places. Members from both parties have been essential to passing every major public lands bill that has been enacted in recent years. This type of cooperative and bipartisan approach to designating special lands for protection as wilderness, national conservation areas, or similar designations has historically been a regular practice for Congress. The designation of the Pine Forest Range has strong support from County government and local citizens. It is a wonderful example of how people can come together to protect one of America's real gems.

**Background**

The Pine Forest Range in northern Nevada's arid Great Basin is a rare and exceptional area of abundant streams and clear, cold subalpine lakes. Nestled in a cirque and fed by snowmelt and springs, these lakes are not only visually stunning but also possess an excellent trout fishery. The lakes are surrounded by a rare remnant population of white bark and limber pines. Stands of quaking aspen and mountain mahogany are also found throughout the proposed wilderness. Fall brings an abundance of color found in few other places in northern Nevada.

The spectacular scenery and vistas, combined with outstanding recreational opportunities, draw thousands of visitors annually. Despite being one of the most highly visited recreational areas in the region, the proposed wilderness still appears pristine. Day hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, and camping are all popular in the area. Visitors enjoy a true primitive recreation experience, without trails or facilities. Even during peak visitation periods, solitude is easy to find in the rugged terrain. Abundant wildlife coveted by sportsmen includes trophy mule deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, and chukar.

A wide range of stakeholders began working cooperatively in 2009 and 2010 to bring together diverse interests in a grass-roots effort to protect this special area. In the fall of 2010, the Humboldt County Commission voted unanimously to approve the final recommendations of the

Pine Forest Range Working Group to designate the Pine Forest Range Wilderness. The Nevada State Legislature subsequently passed a resolution praising the process used in arriving at the consensus represented by H.R. 433.

### **H.R. 433**

H.R. 433 proposes to designate the 26,000-acre Pine Forest Range Wilderness in Humboldt County, Nevada, on public land managed by the BLM. This wilderness area is largely formed by the Blue Lakes and Alder Creek Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Under the bill, approximately 1,150 acres of land within those WSAs would not be designated as wilderness and would be released from WSA status, thereby allowing the consideration of other uses.

Section 13 of H.R. 433 provides for land exchanges to improve the manageability of the Pine Forest Range Wilderness Area and nearby public lands while likewise allowing private landowners the opportunity to consolidate their holdings. The land exchanges are discretionary and would be completed consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and other applicable laws. The BLM supports this provision. In addition, these land acquisitions may be undertaken through existing authorities such as purchase or donation.

The Pine Forest Range Wilderness meets the definition of wilderness; the land and its community of life are largely untrammelled. It has retained its primeval character and has been influenced primarily by the forces of nature, with outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation or solitude. The BLM strongly supports this designation. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on some minor technical modifications and clarification of the map reference.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 433. We look forward to the swift passage of this legislation designating the Pine Forest Range Wilderness.