

34 existing wilderness areas. Most of the federal land addressed by this Act—about 615,000
35 acres—is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Department defers
36 to the Department of the Interior in regards to the proposal to designate BLM lands.

37 A total of about 218,000 acres, lying in 14 of the 34 parcels identified in the Act, include
38 National Forest System (NFS) lands. All 14 parcels also have public land administered
39 by BLM contiguous to the NFS lands. I also want to state how proud we are to partner
40 with the BLM on managing some of our nation’s most treasured lands.

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42 The proposed legislation would designate 13 of the 14 areas having National Forest
43 System Lands as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System upon
44 enactment. The parcels are Badger Creek, Beaver Creek, Browns Canyon, and Grape
45 Creek on the Pike and San Isabel National Forests; the Flat Tops Addition and Thompson
46 Creek on the White River National Forest; Norwood Canyon, Roubideau, West Elk
47 Addition and Unaweep on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
48 (GMUG); Sewemup Mesa on the Manti-LaSal and GMUG; Snaggletooth on the San Juan
49 National Forest; and Handies Peak on the Rio Grande, San Juan, and GMUG.

50 In addition, Deep Creek, on the White River National Forest, is identified as a “Potential
51 Wilderness Area.”

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53 **Evaluation of Proposed Wilderness Areas**

54 We have not completed an extensive review of each of the proposed areas. However,
55 during the development or revision of a forest land and resource management plan
56 (LRMP), each national forest conducts a thorough evaluation of potential wilderness or

57 wilderness study areas to assure recommendations fully satisfy the definition of
58 wilderness found in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Extensive public
59 involvement and input from many interested user groups goes into the development of
60 these plans. They are the foundation by which we evaluate any proposal related to our
61 national forests. Many of the areas cited in this bill were not recommended for
62 wilderness designation in their respective forest plans. An initial assessment of the
63 parcels show them falling into 3 distinct categories: areas we support with minimal
64 adjustment or change, some that merit further discussion and modification; and some we
65 feel different management options or designations would be more appropriate to best
66 balance the interests of our many user groups and fulfill our multiple use mission. We
67 respectfully ask to work with the committee and the bill's sponsor, Representative
68 DeGette, to address these concerns.

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70 **NFS Proposed Wilderness Areas on the White River National Forest**

71 The Department supports wilderness designation of 830 acres of the 16,392 acres in the
72 Flat Tops Addition Proposed Wilderness Area, as recommended in the White River
73 National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2002). The remaining acres
74 would present management problems, such as a cherry-stemmed road intersecting the
75 middle of the area that would encourage the spread of unauthorized motorized trails; a
76 developed campsite; a private resort development directly adjacent to the proposed
77 wilderness; and frequent snowmobile use.

78

79 The Department supports wilderness designation of Assignment Ridge, an area
80 comprising 11,752 acres of the 17,114 acres in the Thompson Creek Proposed
81 Wilderness Area, as recommended in the White River Land and Resource Management
82 Plan. The Braderich Trail, heavily used by mountain bikers, lies within the proposed
83 wilderness boundary. Adjusting the western boundary to reflect the forest plan
84 recommendation would exclude the trail from wilderness, and allow the continuation of
85 mountain biking opportunities while minimizing concern about mechanized trespass.
86 Leasable minerals, three oil and gas leases, and adjacent private lands needing wildland
87 urban interface fuels treatments are additional concerns that argue for limiting the
88 proposed wilderness area to that recommended in the forest plan.

89

90 The Department does not support “Potential Wilderness” designation for the 16,392-acre
91 NFS portion of the Deep Creek Proposed Wilderness Area. The White River National
92 Forest Land and Resource Management Plan specifies that Deep Creek be managed for
93 wild and scenic river objectives pending completion of an ongoing joint BLM/FS
94 suitability study. If, as a result of this study, the river is determined suitable, we would
95 be pleased to support its addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System
96 (WSRS).

97

98 The Act specifies that the Deep Creek area would be designated wilderness “upon the
99 Secretary publishing in the Federal Register a notice that all nonconforming uses... have
100 ceased.” The non-conforming uses relate to High-Altitude Aviation Training Site
101 (HAATS) activities (aerial navigation training maneuver exercises) that occur in this area

102 under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) among the Colorado Army National
103 Guard, Forest Service, and BLM. It should be noted that the correct date of this MOU is
104 November 19, 2007, not August 4, 1987.

105

106 The Act specifies that HAATS exercises may continue under the MOU, but the MOU
107 and associated operating plan shall be reviewed by the parties not later than 180 days
108 after enactment of Act, and annually thereafter. The review is to include consideration of
109 alternative locations for HAATS activities on NFS lands or lands administered by the
110 BLM, other than designated wilderness or potential wilderness areas.

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112 **NFS Proposed Wilderness Areas on the Pike and San Isabel National Forests**

113 The Department supports designation of the Browns Canyon Proposed Wilderness Area.
114 However, we are concerned that the Act would allow continued motorized use of the
115 Turret Road. The road extends 3.25 miles from the proposed wilderness boundary into
116 the heart of the proposed area, virtually bisecting it. This use is problematic for several
117 reasons: some motorized users are driving off the road, creating a system of informal
118 trails that damage vegetation and soil, and disturb wildlife; motorized use creates noise
119 that is inconsistent with wilderness character; and motorized use complicates
120 management of the area for wilderness. Therefore, we suggest that the road be closed to
121 motorized use at Green Gulch, on the border of the proposed wilderness area.

122

123 The Department would like to further discuss designation of the 14,696 acres in the
124 Badger Creek Proposed Wilderness Area. 14,440 acres are inventoried roadless acres.

125 The remaining acres contain motorized roads that would complicate management. We
126 therefore would suggest adjusting the boundary of the proposed wilderness area.

127

128 The Department would also like to further discuss designation of the Beaver Creek
129 Proposed Wilderness Area. This 4,326-acre area is classified as inventoried roadless with
130 no non-conforming uses. However, there are concerns that designating this area as
131 wilderness could inhibit our ability to actively fight fire in the wildland urban interface.

132

133 The Department does not support designation of the 16,913-acre Grape Creek Proposed
134 Wilderness Area. Much of the proposed area is a network of motorized roads that would
135 not offer a true wilderness experience. Other nonconforming uses include power
136 transmission lines and pipelines under special-use permit.

137

138 At the same time there is a smaller portion of this area-5,866 inventoried roadless acres
139 known as West Tanner Peak-that we feel would merit further consideration. The
140 westernmost portion of the Tanner Peak area, adjacent to BLM lands, makes a more
141 manageable topographic boundary and would exclude motorized trails.

142

143 **NFS Proposed Wilderness Areas on the Rio Grande, San Juan and Grand Mesa,**
144 **Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG)**

145 The Handies Peak Proposed Wilderness Area has a number of uses that would not
146 conform to the Wilderness Act and that could complicate its management as wilderness.
147 Wager Gulch is a heavily used motorized corridor on the east side of the proposed

148 wilderness area; numerous roads would encourage motorized trespass. Moreover, a land
149 exchange in Wager Gulch is currently being analyzed. Mountain bike use occurs in the
150 Cuba Gulch area, and there is a private in-holding. The Hard Rock 100 foot race also
151 crosses a portion of the area. We do not support wilderness designation for this area.

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153 **NFS Proposed Wilderness on the GMUG**

154 The Norwood Canyon Proposed Wilderness Area has a number of nonconforming uses,
155 including existing and pending oil and gas leases; a power line; past and planned forest
156 management treatments, plantations and fuel treatment projects; and a four-mile cherry
157 stem that would complicate management as wilderness. We do not support wilderness
158 designation of this area.

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160 The NFS portion of the Roubideau Proposed Wilderness Area adjoins the BLM's
161 Roubideau Wilderness Study Area. This 2,161 acre parcel has no motorized or non-
162 conforming uses. Rather than discussing the merits of this smaller parcel, we would like
163 to be involved in any future discussions regarding the designation of the entire Roubideau
164 Wilderness Area.

165

166 The Department does not support designation of the 39,392-acre Unaweep Proposed
167 Wilderness Area. Most of this area has a number of nonconforming uses including
168 motorized use, extensive vegetation management (pinyon, juniper, and oakbrush), timber
169 harvest, mechanical fuels treatments, water transportation ditches, and reservoirs.

170 The Department would like to further discuss designation of the West Elk Addition
171 Proposed Wilderness Area. Currently the West Elk Wilderness is managed as a single-
172 unit by the GMUG. The proposed addition comprises lands adjacent to it that are
173 managed by the Forest Service, BLM, and National Park Service. The complexity of
174 managing the proposed addition could be reduced by consolidating management of the
175 federal lands in the proposed addition under one agency. It should be noted that the
176 proposed area was identified in the Final Resource Protection Study/EIS for the Curecanti
177 National Recreation Area (NRA) (August 2008) as land to be added to the NRA .

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179 **Manti-LaSal and GMUG National Forests**

180 The Sewemup Mesa Proposed Wilderness Area straddles the state line of Colorado and
181 Utah. There are old uranium mines at the lower end of Roc Creek, and uranium and
182 active oil and gas leases within the proposed wilderness. Limited public access and
183 uncontrolled motorized traffic would also pose significant problems. We do not support
184 the proposed wilderness designation of Sewemup Mesa.

185

186 **San Juan National Forest**

187 The Snaggletooth Proposed Wilderness Area has a large number of nonconforming uses,
188 including 27 oil and gas leases, roads that are used for recreation and permitted uses,
189 active uranium mine claims, potash prospecting permits, timber treatments, wildlife
190 habitat improvements, and fuels treatments. We do not support the proposed wilderness
191 designation for this area.

192

193 **Summary**

194 In summary, some of the proposed areas in this bill merit wilderness designation or at
195 least, further discussion. However, many of the parcels cited in the bill have a variety of
196 conflicting uses and human impacts that are inconsistent with wilderness character. We
197 want to work with the Committee to take a close look at some of the proposed wilderness
198 areas to identify these nonconforming uses in detail and adjust boundaries, where
199 possible, to identify manageable areas that include the highest-value wilderness
200 characteristics. In addition, we strongly support the water provisions in the Act, which
201 state that the Secretary shall obtain and exercise water rights pursuant to the laws of the
202 State of Colorado for federal purposes necessary for wilderness and wilderness uses.

203

204 This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may
205 have.