

Testimony of

Dan Hammerbeck

October 27, 2005

House Resource Committee

Center Idaho Development and Recreation Act

October 27, 2005

Chairman Pombo and Congressmen:

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you about a subject that is important to me the Boulder White Cloud Mountains.

I live in Custer County, in the small community of Stanley, and I have snowmobiled in these mountains for almost 25 years. I came to Stanley 5 years ago from a nearby community dominated by anti-motorized people. Most of the areas where I had ridden for years were suddenly off-limits to anyone using motorized equipment. I chose Stanley because of its proximity to the Boulder White Clouds. The vast wide-open bowls, the views, and remoteness of the country provide me an opportunity like no other. In these mountains, in the dead of winter, I can ride all day without seeing others. Trust me when I tell you that one doesn't need designated wilderness to provide solitude or a primitive experience. It is available every winter day in the Boulder White Cloud Mountains.

But this isn't just about my love for the Boulder White Clouds. I am here representing the Idaho State Snowmobile Association and Idaho Recreation Council. We have members from every part of Idaho, many of who wanted to sit in this seat. They recognize that the opinions of folks from Custer County are important. But they ask you to remember that equally important are the opinions of those who live elsewhere but have ridden these mountains for years, those who started as children and now take their families there and hope one day to share it with their grandchildren.

HR 3603 would add 300,011 acres to the already massive acreage of wildernesses in Central Idaho. The Forest Service found almost 100,000 acres of this unsuitable. We see no logical tie between adding these wildernesses and economic recovery of Central Idaho. Custer County has large expanses of federal land that no longer produce revenues to support its infrastructure, and it already has two major wildernesses that have done little to bolster its economy. In fact, more wildernesses will likely have the opposite effect, permanently locking most recreationists away from the area's major attraction, the Boulder White Clouds. This is done in spite of the fact that motorized and mechanized recreationists have used them for years with an impact so minimal that they still qualify as wilderness. Without access to the Boulder White Clouds, motorized recreation in Custer County will wither. Small communities like Stanley, which has worked so hard to establish a recreation/tourism-based economy, will see their hopes dashed and their efforts wasted.

If wilderness were good for the economy, Challis's would already be booming! But it isn't. Neither is Elk City, or Grangeville or the other communities adjacent to large Idaho wildernesses. Studies show that only 4% of the public uses wildernesses and much of the money they spend to recreate there goes to businesses far away from the gateway communities. If the money authorized for giveaways and developments is ever actually appropriated it will be spent quickly, but the land will be forever off-limits to the majority of Americans who are unable or prefer not to hike or ride horses.

If wilderness is the best choice for the Boulders then shouldn't a wilderness bill stand on its own merits without the buyoffs? If Custer County needs an economic boost from the federal coffers shouldn't that also stand on its own merits without ties to a wilderness bill? And what about every other rural community that is struggling because of the loss of timber and mining jobs? Why is one county more deserving than another?

You could benefit all of the economically depressed counties throughout the Northwest by renewing and increasing funding to the "Secure Rural Schools Act and Community Self Determination Act" of 2000. Rather than closing vast areas of federal land to mineral entry by making them wilderness you could encourage responsible development of our mineral resources. Rather than buying out grazing operations that have been a vital part of the western economy for generations, you could help ranchers construct improvements that would make their operations compatible with resources such as clean water and salmon. Instead a power no less than the Federal Government is taking ranching, recreation, and tourism out of the picture in the name of economic recovery.

CIEDRA's economic incentives of giving away public land, cash grants, buyouts and certain developments, such as a motor park adjacent to Boise, are meaningless to us. Believe us when we say that a 960-acre motor park near Boise is no substitute for the Boulder White Cloud Mountains-- plus we see no way that our state can afford to construct and maintain this park. Although we applaud the efforts of Congressman Simpson to minimize the impacts of his bill on the recreating public, its result for the mechanized and motorized recreation community is a large net loss of recreation access.

Idaho has over 4 million acres of designated wilderness already. With an increasing demand for the use of our public lands it is time for Congress to look at another designation. We must move away from the argument that there are only two choices; full-fledged development or wilderness. What we actually need today, and will need even more in the future, are quality backcountry lands available for a variety of recreation pursuits. It is time for Congress to consider a designation, such as Backcountry, that requires the federal agencies to maintain the primitive character of the land, while accommodating responsible use.

Senator Frank Church said "The White Clouds offer a majestic mountain stage for outdoor recreation of singular quality". We agree and Idahoans are using this land in a respectful way that does not compromise its resources. There is no compelling reason to designate the Boulder White Cloud Mountains as wilderness. HR 3603 is a bad bill that deserves to go no further.

Thank you.
Dan Hammerbeck
P.O. Box 268
Stanley, ID 83278
208.774.2903
ahamm@ruralnetwork.net