

STATEMENT OF
JOEL HOLTROP
DEPUTY CHIEF NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
JUNE 10, 2010
REGARDING
HR 4823 THE SEDONA-RED ROCK NATIONAL SCENIC AREA ACT OF 2010

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of Agriculture's view on H.R. 4823, the Sedona-Red Rock National Scenic Area Act of 2010. The Department supports establishing the Sedona-Red Rock National Scenic Area (NSA) and would offer some minor modifications to H.R. 4823.

The spectacular Red Rock landscape of the Coconino National Forest is now enjoyed by nearly 4 million visitors each year. This popularity is easy to explain. Red Rock country is a truly distinct landscape with astonishing red rock spires, mesas, and lush canyons presenting a landscape that has long been celebrated nationally and internationally.

Visitor use must be balanced with protection of the area's unusually diverse wildlife, waters, fragile soils and extraordinary archaeological resources. Coconino National Forest managers are working with the local community to ensure access and provide interpretation and basic services that must be in place to support visitors and to protect and conserve this fragile landscape. The designation of a National Scenic Area would strongly support the goals of visitor access, use and interpretation.

The “Coconino Forest Plan and Amendment 12”, released in 1998, ensures that the 160,000-acre Sedona-Red Rock area is managed in a way that has overwhelming support. This Plan includes goals and objectives related to recreation opportunities, land exchanges, commercial tours, off-road travel, wildlife habitat, and Wilderness. The proposed Scenic Area boundary was developed within the “Coconino Forest Plan and Amendment 12”.

Under provisions of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004, the Coconino National Forest has implemented a recreation fee area for the 160,000 acres of Red Rock National Forest landscape. The Red Rock Pass now generates about \$1 million annually. This helps maintain the facilities and sites that provide visitor access, services and information.

Within the proposed NSA there are 13 developed campgrounds/picnic areas, 3 visitor centers, 2 Research Natural Areas, portions of 3 wilderness areas, 2 developed archaeological sites, miles of popular hiking trails, and scenic roads including the Red Rock All American Road and the Oak Creek Canyon State Scenic Highway. Thirty commercial tour companies operate in the area providing visitor services and economic development for the area. The area supports the largest volunteer program in the National Forest System with over 50,000 volunteer hours annually from individuals and civic groups. Forest Service efforts are augmented by a trails partnership with the City of Sedona, federal scenic byway funds, state water protection funds, and revenue from the Red Rock Pass program. National Scenic Area designation offers a framework to broaden relationships, enhance resource protection, and recognize the importance of consistent development within the area.

Since January of 1999, much of the local community has favored a special designation. The Sedona City Council has passed a resolution in support of Congressional special designation of the National Forest lands in the Sedona area. There is grass-root support by many local organizations as well as petitions signed by more than 5,000 citizens.

We would like to work with the Committee on three amendments/modifications to the bill to address several concerns. Section 2(d) would require that the NSA be administered in accordance with the Act, the land and resource management plan of the Coconino National Forest, and laws and regulations generally applicable to National Forest System lands. We recommend that the provision be amended to expressly state that the land and natural resource management plan to which the language refers is not limited to that plan in effect at the time of enactment but, rather includes any subsequent amendments or revisions to the plan.

Subsection 2(e) would limit land exchanges that dispose of National Forest System lands within the NSA. A land exchange would be authorized only if it results in the acquisition of in-holdings within the NSA and if the land acquired is from a willing seller. For land exchanges that meet these conditions, the agency would have to complete an environmental analysis and provide opportunity to comment in accordance with the forest plan. We recommend that subsection (e)(2) be amended to clarify that the environmental analysis must be carried out in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), as opposed to the forest plan, and that the exchange must be consistent with the forest plan. We also recommend adding language providing that any land acquired within the boundaries of the NSA be administered in accordance with subsection 2(d) of this legislation. We are concerned that Section 2(f) (1) (A) would require that the receipts from the sale or exchange of land on the Coconino

National Forest be used for the acquisition of lands within the NSA, or for the operation, maintenance, or enhancement of the NSA. The Administration does not support an exemption to the law for this location. Consistent with the Sisk Act, (PL 90-171), we recommend amending the bill to authorize the use of the funds received from the sale of National Forest Systems land and deposited into the Special Fund for the subsequent purchase/acquisition of other National Forest System lands within the same state, namely Arizona.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

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CONCERNING
H.R. 5009, DESIGNATING CERTAIN LANDS IN THE WASATCH MOUNTAINS
OF SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH AS WILDERNESS, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Department's views on H.R. 5009, which would designate certain National Forest System lands within the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache ("Wasatch") National Forest as wilderness, establish the Helisking Special Management Area within the Wasatch National Forest, provide for a land exchange with Snowbird Corporation ("Snowbird"), and authorize activities for watershed management.

While we support the goals of adding to the Nation's wilderness areas, we have a number of concerns with H.R. 5009. Our principal concern is that the lands to be designated as wilderness in the Wasatch are generally not suitable for wilderness designation. In addition, we have concerns with other provisions of the bill which we summarize in this testimony. In summary, much of the land that would be designated as wilderness are close in proximity to Salt Lake City, and provides a wide variety of current uses that would not be permitted to continue in designated wilderness. In addition, the current forest plan, which was developed through extensive public involvement and input, already provides long-term watershed protection for the Wasatch Front.

Wilderness Designations

Section 2 of the bill would add to or designate additional wilderness areas in northern Utah within the Wasatch National Forest. Approximately 4,627 acres would be added to the Lone Peak Wilderness, and 813 acres to the Mount Olympus Wilderness. New designations include approximately 2,342 acres to be known as the Bear Trap Wilderness and approximately 7,759 acres to be known as the Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness.

The Forest Service fully analyzed these areas for potential wilderness designation in the 2003 forest plan revision for the Wasatch National Forest, and did not recommend them because many popular, current uses such as mountain biking and ATV-riding would no longer be allowed.

In addition, many of the proposed wilderness boundaries are in close proximity to communities, residences, major roadways and developed recreation sites. These boundaries pose a potentially significant constraint on future opportunities to construct or reconstruct vital public utility infrastructure, such as new or upgraded power lines, installation of broadband technologies or sanitation facilities, while maintaining the character of the wilderness areas.

Heliskiing Special Management Area

Section 3 would designate approximately 10,479 acres of National Forest lands contiguous to existing wilderness as a “Heliskiing Special Management Area.” The area would be managed to maintain its existing wilderness character, except that heliskiing authorized on the date of enactment would be allowed to continue. We have concerns about this designation as it sets an undesirable precedent for legislated designations based on one specific activity, and would compromise wilderness values. It is also not clear what activities would be allowed in the special management area to support commercial heliskiing and snowboarding. Forest Service land managers will have the difficult task of balancing the needs of a heliskiing business and the maintenance of wilderness character of the land.

Land Exchange

Section 5 of H.R. 5009 would direct the Secretary to expedite a land exchange with Snowbird involving land owned by Snowbird in the Flagstaff White Pine and Red Pine areas of Little and Big Cottonwood Canyons and National Forest System land located in the American Fork Twins. The bill states Congress’ intent that the land exchange be completed within one year of date of enactment of the bill. The bill also states it is anticipated that the lands acquired by Snowbird would eventually be used to expand its ski resort operations.

We have several concerns with the land exchange directed by the bill. We are uncertain exactly which National Forest System lands would be conveyed to Snowbird under the bill. Furthermore, given the history of this area, the parcels that may be exchanged by Snowbird are likely to exhibit the impacts of past mining operations, including abandoned mines, which will require hazardous materials assessment and remediation. These areas typically have tunnels, adits and other hazards. There is also no requirement that Snowbird convey the property free of hazardous materials or other conditions. Failure to correct any hazardous conditions will result in the Forest Service being required to remediate the issues to ensure maintenance of the wilderness character of the lands. The bill does not require Snowbird to convey land that has a clear title, consistent with Department of Justice standards. The bill also does not provide any mechanisms for an equal value exchange, which would be consistent with Administration land exchange policies.

The bill directs that the land exchange be completed in one year. However, this timeline would make it extremely difficult to involve the public and comply with the relevant regulations and laws regarding land exchanges. In addition, an environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 should be prepared before the land exchange, to involve the public and identify any impacts of the exchange. The Agency

line officer should make the decision on whether or not to proceed with the exchange and under what conditions. Alternately, the agency could perform the NEPA analysis and provide the results to Congress to provide further direction in subsequent legislation.

Watershed Management

Section 6 of the bill would authorize motorized access, road maintenance, and necessary vegetative management in the areas that would be designated as wilderness and in the special management area. Much of this area is a congressionally designated watershed, established as Public Law in 1934, and provides additional protections and considerations for the area. Vegetation management would conflict with wilderness character and values, and is one of the reasons that these areas were not recommended for wilderness in the Forest Plan.

Conclusion

While we have concerns with H.R. 5009, we support the primary goals of the bill, namely to increase wilderness, improve recreation opportunities and enhance watershed protection for the Wasatch Front. We look forward to working with the sponsor and the committee to achieve these goals.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I am happy to answer any questions that you or Members of the Committee may have.

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CONCERNING
H.R. 5194- Mt. Andrea Lawrence Designation Act of 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on H.R. 5194, the Mt. Andrea Lawrence Designation Act of 2010. We have consulted with the U. S. Department of the Interior – National Park Service in the preparation of this statement.

H.R. 5194 – Mt. Andrea Lawrence Designation Act of 2010

This legislation directs the designation of an unnamed 12,240 foot peak, located on the boundary between Ansel Adams Wilderness Area and Yosemite National Park approximately six tenths miles (0.6) northeast of Donahue Peak, as “Mt. Andrea Lawrence.” The management of the proposed Mt. Andrea Lawrence is shared between the Inyo National Forest and Yosemite National Park.

Ms. Lawrence was a successful Olympic athlete and a committed public servant, having served 16-years on the Mono County Board of Supervisors and founded the Andrea Lawrence Institute for Mountains and Rivers. She was a strong supporter of the work of the Inyo National Forest and Yosemite National Park. She worked tirelessly to protect the health and vitality of the environment and economies in the Eastern Sierra and the Sierra Nevada Region as a whole. Ms. Lawrence passed away at the age of 76 on March 31, 2009.

The Department has no objection to the enactment of H.R. 5194 and notes that it would have no adverse impact to the management of the Inyo National Forest, or the Ansel Adams Wilderness.

However, the Board on Geographic Names was created by Congress in 1947 to establish and maintain uniform geographic name usage throughout the Federal Government. It is Board policy not to consider names that commemorate living persons. In addition, a person must be deceased at least 5-years before a commemorative proposal will be considered. In accordance with the Board's interpretation of Wilderness Act of 1964, the Board on Geographic Names discourages naming features in Congressionally designated wilderness areas unless an overriding need can be

demonstrated. Although the Department does not have any objections to the enactment of HR 5194, maintaining consistency with the longstanding policies of the Board on Geographic Names is recommended.

The Department recognizes the contributions of Ms. Lawrence to both the United States and California, and concurs with the principles embodied in the legislation. Should the legislation be enacted, the Forest Service would work to ensure that our visitor information maps reflect the new designation, and understand that the National Park Service would do the same when their maps, signs, and other informational materials are replaced or updated

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