

TESTIMONY OF FORREST MCCARTHY, OUTDOOR ALLIANCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE ROLE OF FEDERAL
LANDS IN COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Forrest McCarthy. I live in Jackson Hole, Wyoming and I am the Public Lands Director of Winter Wildlands Alliance. I also serve on the Teton County Planning Commission, and have been an alpine mountain and backcountry ski guide for almost twenty years. As a mountain guide, I have had the privilege to spend a great deal of time in places like Antarctica, South America, Alaska and my home state of Wyoming.

During my travels I became the first person to set foot on B-15, the largest iceberg ever recorded, near the Ross Shelf in Antarctica. My time in the Polar Regions later inspired me to earn a master's degree in physical geography from the University of Wyoming, where I studied how rapidly warming temperatures transform arctic Alaskan land cover. By replicating historic photographs I documented not only the recession of glaciers, but also the thawing of permafrost and advancement of shrubs, tundra, and tree cover.

Today, I am testifying on behalf of the Outdoor Alliance, a coalition of six national, member-based organizations devoted to conservation and stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters through responsible human-powered outdoor recreation. Outdoor Alliance includes: Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance and represents the interests of the millions Americans who hike, paddle, climb, backpack, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters and snowscapes.

Not unlike indicator species, human-powered outdoor pursuits can be seen as "indicator activities" with respect to climate change because we are some of the first people to experience the impacts of climate change on our public lands. Declining snowpack shortens ski and snowshoe seasons, makes alpine climbing more dangerous and can eliminate ice climbing altogether. Less snowpack also means less water in our creeks, rivers and lakes for paddling. Higher temperatures and prolonged droughts create severe imbalances in forest, alpine, desert, and river ecosystems that stress native species and degrade the quality of the outdoor

recreation. One of the results of this imbalance, increased wildfire activity, directly impacts pursuits such as rock climbing, hiking and mountain biking and our collective ability to enjoy public lands.

A personal loss for me is the legendary, Black Ice Couloir, a challenging ice climb high on the northwest face of the Grand Teton. Today, due to warming temperatures, all the ice is gone and future generations of mountaineers will never have the opportunity to attempt one of the most renowned alpine climbs in North America.

The outdoor community's interest in climate protection is axiomatic – the places where we conduct our outdoor pursuits and that support the \$730 billion annual outdoor recreation economy are imperiled by a warming climate. Our self interest in combating climate change, however, is coupled with some distinct insight as to how our federal lands can help us meet this challenge, and we are honored to be able to share these insights with you today.

As of late, it seems that the primary role of federal lands in combating climate change is to passively provide evidence of not only the existence of climate change, but also the rapidity with which it is taking place. We envision a more proactive, three-part role for federal lands in combating climate change.

I. Federal Lands Must Facilitate an Ecosystem Adaptation Policy That Protects Flora And Fauna, but Also Takes into Account the Human Aspects of Federal Lands

In prior Congresses, both chambers generated thoughtful legislative approaches to climate protection. Wisely, some of these approaches directed towards ecosystem protection some of the revenues from market-based efforts to cap and reduce carbon. As we understand it, adaptation is the portfolio of efforts to counteract the effects of a warming climate on ecosystems and the flora and fauna therein.

Federal lands are where much ecosystem adaptation activity will take place, and federal land management agencies will likely play a material role in designing and implementing adaptation policy. Adaptation policy should include preserving large tracts of open space through a pragmatic approach ranging from protective federal designation to voluntary conservation easements. Adaptation must also include physical structures and land management techniques to facilitate migration and land use planning that puts a premium on contiguous open space. Our system of national trails and the critical open space through which they run, from the Appalachian Trail to the Continental Divide and the Pacific Crest Trails, may very well assist in this objective.

A universal aspect of human-powered outdoor pursuits is that they take place outdoors in a context that includes not only the topography and gradient of a given place, but the flora and fauna as well. The ecosystem is not merely the setting for our pursuits; it is the very substrate. Taking care of the ecosystem must take precedence over how we enjoy and profit from it. We say this without qualification given the longstanding conservation and stewardship ethic in the outdoor community. This said, we also think there is an argument for conceptualizing adaptation goals and policies a little more broadly.

Long before people recognized the idea of an ecosystem, individual parts were honored through everything from creation myths and totem poles to the landscapes of the Hudson River School artists and our government's foresight in creating a National Park System almost 100 years ago. In addition to being the home to plants and animals, ecosystems and landscapes mean something to people, particularly to Americans. We suggest that as adaptation policy is developed and implemented, some consideration is given to how climate change will impact federal lands, waters and snowscapes as they relate to sustainable human uses. Consideration should include not only human-powered recreation uses, but also the associated economic impacts to the outdoor recreation economy and other traditional uses such as hunting, fishing and wildlife enjoyment.

This concept was explored last Congress in the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act of 2008, S. 3036, where a provision specifically directed the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to take into account "the potential to provide enhanced access to land and waters for fishing, hunting, and other public recreational uses" when making spending decisions for adaptation purposes. S. 3036, 110th Cong. §4702(c)(4) (2008). We encourage both chambers to further explore this concept as it develops climate protection legislation in this Congress.

II. Federal Lands Must Simultaneously Be Protected As Carbon Sinks And Thoughtfully Developed For Renewable Energy

Federal Lands as Carbon Sinks

Our federal lands contain millions of acres of forests and grasslands. As trees, plants and other organic material not only store carbon, but remove it from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, we think that another critical role federal lands can play in combating climate change is maximizing, to the extent practicable, the amount of forest land, both old growth and reforested areas.

Protecting and enhancing forest carbon sinks can be pursued in a number of ways, but primarily through land designations and strategic acquisitions that protect existing forests and reduce development sprawl. We support a portfolio approach

to land designation that includes wilderness areas, national scenic areas, national recreational areas, and especially open space designations in close proximity to population centers. These goals need not wait for climate protection legislation, but could be achieved, in part, by permanently protecting inventoried roadless areas in the Forest System, passing the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2008, and reauthorizing the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act before it expires in 2010.

In addition to the protective designations and strategic acquisitions of federal land itself, there may be a role for federal land management agencies to facilitate or encourage the protection of state and private forestland for its carbon sink attributes.

Thoughtful Renewable Energy Development

Despite the great assistance forested federal lands provide in climate change mitigation from their natural function, such mitigation will not offset man-made carbon emissions enough to protect the climate. To adequately reduce carbon emissions, alternative energy sources and technologies must be developed and much of this development will take place on federal land. While the outdoor community heartily welcomes the chance to reduce the nation's reliance on energy sources and technologies that damage our climate, we insist that this path is pursued in a manner that takes into account other aspects and values of federal land. Given the scale of renewable energy projects needed to adequately deal with climate protection, the landscape impact of renewable energy projects, including solar arrays, wind farms (and the necessary transmission lines) may very well dwarf the landscape impacts of traditional energy projects.

As evidenced by our nation's current hardrock mining policy, when a single use of federal land is generally allowed to trump all other uses, the costs will eventually outweigh the benefits (especially if the policy is essentially left in place for 137 years). Thankfully, there are other federal laws on the books that balance the multiple uses of federal land more evenly, such as the Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 791a, *et. seq.* In outlining the powers of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to issue licenses for the construction of hydropower projects, the statute requires FERC to:

[G]ive equal consideration to the purposes of energy conservation, the protection, mitigation of damage to, and enhancement of, fish and wildlife (including related spawning grounds and habitat), the protection of recreational opportunities, and the preservation of other aspects of environmental quality.

Federal Power Act § 797(e), 16 U.S.C. § 791a (2008).

The practical effect of the equal consideration language, and the fact that hydropower projects are subject to a fixed term of 30 to 50 years, is that FERC must balance power and non-power values in their decision process. When rivers are developed for hydropower, mitigation measures ensure that the needs of fish and wildlife are addressed, recreational opportunities on the river are provided, and local communities' needs are considered. In other cases where ecosystem and recreation values outweigh the value of the river for hydropower development, projects are not constructed or in some cases removed at the end of their license term.

The outdoor community believes that analogous language to the Federal Power Act's equal consideration clause should be used to guide the pending development of alternative and renewable energy projects on federal land. We also believe that this language may be appropriate for other endeavors to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, such as subterranean carbon sequestration, or other yet to be developed engineering techniques. The role for federal land is thus to aggressively combat the increase in atmospheric carbon, but not at the expense of the other inherent values of the land.

Aside from legislative direction, we also feel that it is incumbent upon all public lands user communities, from recreation communities to the businesses that rely on federal lands, to work directly and proactively with the renewable energy community. We believe this effort should develop common ground, and possibly some best management practices for assuring that renewable energy production and transmission can coexist with other sustainable uses of federal public land.

III. Healthy Federal Land is Our Common Ground and Can Unify All Americans for the Present and Future Challenges Associated with Combating Climate Change

Climate change is typically framed in dramatic and sobering terms. Currents of fear and guilt associated with an energy-intensive existence permeate much of the conversation, and there is great anxiety not only over the changes to the natural world, but the anticipated changes to the American economy and way of life. Though fear can be an excellent motivator in the short term, too much of it can lead to fatalism and apathy. Climate protection legislation is really only one of the *first* steps in a nation-wide effort that will last for decades. Fear must be tempered with hope and the expectation that there will be some positive developments along the way.

When climbing North America's highest mountain, Mount McKinley, climbers make momentous sacrifices. Ascending McKinley is expensive, long, grueling, and dangerous. Yet every year over a thousand aspiring summiteers embrace the

challenge. When climbing McKinley it is critical that climbers respect the mountain and understand the inherent risks involved. However, if an expedition exercises careful planning, good judgment, team work, effective communication, acute awareness, and commitment, the risks can be managed and the goal of reaching the summit obtained. Like climbing McKinley, the road to a stable climate will be challenging and committing; we must not be fearful, but rather thoughtful, careful and decisive.

Stabilizing our climate will require change and sacrifice, but there must be some public rewards woven into the plan to assure the public remains vested in this critical effort over the long term. Healthy public lands provide a tangible reward for our sacrifices and commitment to protecting our climate and the ecosystems that depend on it. Public lands provide citizens with the opportunity to view wildlife, play in the rivers and snow, test one's skills on a steep rock or a single track, and experience first-hand the natural world. The importance of our public lands transcends their value as refuge for wildlife or as natural carbon sinks, they are the refuges for people as well. Our public lands provide the opportunity for Americans to stay connected to the natural world. Only through this connection will we have the commitment and collective endurance to achieve the goal of stabilizing our climate.

Conclusion

As Congress pursues this daunting, but profoundly necessary legislative effort; Outdoor Alliance encourages a central role of science and perhaps a new level of bureaucratic flexibility to better cope with the interrelated nature of the challenges ahead.

Because different parcels of federal lands are managed according to the priorities and peculiarities of the different land management agencies' organic acts, there is some utility in exploring new ways that the federal land management agencies can work collaboratively on climate protection. Likewise, we believe that the three roles for federal lands outlined in this testimony – facilitating ecosystem adaptation, protecting carbon sinks while supporting careful renewable energy development, and motivating long-term public support for the associated challenges, should be pursued in a manner where they can coexist and complement each other.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee.