

# Committee on Resources

[resources.committee@mail.house.gov](mailto:resources.committee@mail.house.gov)

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## Chairman Richard W. Pombo

### F&FH Legislative Hearing on HR 822, HR 4806, & HR 4838

I'd first like to recognize and thank our colleagues from Washington, Mr. Nethercutt and Larsen, for requesting this hearing. The proposed Wild Sky Wilderness has been a big issue in the State of Washington, and after meeting recently with Mr. Nethercutt, I agreed to hold a hearing on HR 822 to discuss and further examine its merits.

As the Chairman of the Resources Committee, I've had many wilderness bills sent my direction. To expedite review of these bills, the Committee has carefully crafted guidelines that all reasonable and sound wilderness proposals should meet. My criteria simply require bills to meet the standards and intent set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Often, in the past, wilderness areas have been designated without good-faith consultation and demonstrated local support—this, is wrong. Local communities and economies are particularly affected by wilderness designations—they must have a say in legislation affecting them, their community and their way of life. The hearing today will help in this regard.

Simply said, a segment of HR 822, the Wild Sky Wilderness Act, is not consistent with the Committee's guidelines or the Wilderness Act. Much of the proposed wilderness area does not meet the actual definition of wilderness. Wilderness, as written in the 1964 Act is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man" and "an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence." Yet, HR 822 has miles of roads, culverts, bridges and dams—this is not wilderness. Last year, the Administration stated on the record, that the Wild Sky wilderness proposal would include roughly 16,000 acres of land deemed not suitable by the Forest Service. This includes some 8,000 acres of previously harvested and roaded land, roughly 2,000 acres of private land, about 3,000 acres of public access routes, and close to 3,000 acres for Forest Service boundary adjustments.

The authors of this bill also claim that the wilderness would protect "outdoor opportunities" of the area—yet, due to endangered species in the area and late successional reserve requirements, it would be nearly impossible for the Forest Service to create any new trails in much of the area. The reality is that existing management restrictions (and the opinion of the local Forest Service) would likely preclude the building of any new trails in the area. Thus, there would be less access, not more, for this area.

To sum up, I'd like everyone to take a look at the picture of the bridge below. This bridge is located near the center of the proposed area. How can this be considered "untrammelled by man"?

With all of this said, I am willing to work with Mr. Nethercutt, Mr. Larsen and Senator Murray on the legislation to address these concerns and move a bill that is supported by communities, protects from wildfire and other natural disasters, and is consistent with the Wilderness Act. Unfortunately, a line has already been drawn in the sand. Yesterday, Senator Murray stated that anything less than a wilderness designation for the entire area would basically be unacceptable. Mr. Nethercutt has already expressed his enthusiasm to work with the Committee on a bill that's good for all of Washington State. I'm hopeful that my other colleagues in the House share that willingness.