HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
REPUBLICANS | RANKING MEMBER ROB BISHOP

Opposition to the H.R. 2546 Wilderness Package on the Floor 2/12/20

- This package of wilderness bills represents the Democrats' failed public lands management agenda that has singlehandedly resulted in some of the worst wildfire seasons ever seen in the west.
- Some of the provisions in this package are opposed by the Member of Congress that represent the areas affected. A number of provisions are opposed by local stakeholders or counties.
- There are provisions in this package that could have negative impacts on military readiness activities.

This package of divisive bills is ideological, partisan and ultimately going nowhere. Public lands decisions should be made with local collaboration and input. They have real consequences for communities on the ground who live with the consequences of these significant federal land management decisions. None of the bills contained in this package comes close to the type of balance and local consensus necessary for bills of this magnitude.

Collectively this package of bills impacting lands in California, Colorado, and Washington creates nearly 1.5 million acres of new wilderness, the most restrictive federal land use classification; it designates 843 miles of wild and scenic rivers; and it creates 100,000 acres of National Monument expansion. It also adds massive new management burdens to federal agencies when what we need is better greater management of what we already own.

This partisan proposal also arbitrarily adds wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers in areas where those designations are inappropriate. According to official testimony provided by the relevant land management agencies, many of the wilderness and wild and scenic river designations contained in this bill are not suitable for these restrictive designations. To declare areas that do not possess these characteristics undermines the integrity of the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as well as the lands that possess those features.

Many of the local communities impacted by this wilderness package have raised significant concerns ranging from the loss of motorized access and recreation, the elimination of multiple use of the land, and the overall threat to local rural economies. However, a chief and growing concern in these western states is the increased threat of catastrophic wildfire. This threat will only worsen under the restrictive management regimes imposed by this legislation across wide swaths of federal lands in three States that rank in the top ten nationally for severe wildfire threat.

Bills Included in the So-Called "Protecting America's Wilderness Act"

H.R. 2546 (DeGette), Colorado Wilderness Act

- This bill would designate 741,000 acres as wilderness areas in 33 areas throughout Colorado, adding to the existing 3.5 million acres of protected wilderness in the State.
- Many local stakeholders are concerned that the creation of 741,000 additional acres of wilderness will severely limit motorized access and eliminate multiple use.
- The Mesa County Commission and Garfield County oppose this legislation due to concerns with restricting access and increased risk of forest fires under the legislation.
- Some of the designated wilderness in this bill is in Congressman Tipton's district and Congressman Lamborn's district despite their objections.

H.R. 1708 (Schiff), Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act

- The bill would add approximately 191,000 acres to the existing 154,000 acres that currently comprise the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA).
- This is roughly 20,000 more acres than was recommended by the National Park Service (NPS).
- Only 15% of the SMMNRA land is currently owned by the NPS and approximately half the lands are privately owned with houses and businesses on site. In addition to private property rights concerns, expansion of the SMMNRA will make it more difficult (if not impossible) to site new communication towers and needed public utilities.

H.R. 2642 (Kilmer), Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act-

- This bill would designate 126,500 acres as wilderness and 464 miles of wild and scenic rivers.
- State Legislature representatives have in the past opposed similar legislation, citing concerns over the struggling logging industry and increased wildfire risk.
- Despite claims that local concerns have been addressed, city councils of Aberdeen and Cosmopolis (which are situated near the designations) as well as the Gray Harbor County Commission (which has parts of the wilderness designations within its boundaries) have been opposed to the bill since it was first proposed.

H.R. 2250 (Huffman), Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act

- This bill would create roughly 262,000 acres of wilderness, 379 miles of new wild and scenic rivers, and a 730,000-acre restoration area, and include provisions concerning the restoration, economic development, and conservation of, and recreational access to, certain public lands in Northern California.
- Del Norte County wrote a letter to Rep. Huffman in September 2017 expressing concerns about the proposal, noting that 80% of Del Norte County is owned by the State or federal government and expressed concerns about access being restricted, lands not meeting wilderness criteria being added as wilderness, and impairment of any potential commercial use of the lands that the County could potentially benefit from.
- The Trinity County Board of Supervisors also voted to oppose this legislation.

H.R. 2199 (Carbajal), Central Coast Heritage Protection Act

- This bill would create four new wilderness areas, expand nine existing wilderness areas, and create a new 400-mile national recreation trail. In total this bill seeks to designate 250,000 acres of land as wilderness which would be cut off from mining and logging operations.
- Part of this bill would establish 80,000 acres near the Carrizo Plain National Monument as a wilderness area. This is in direct response to the 2018 approval by the Bureau of Land Management of a new oil and gas well within the Monument utilizing the same pad as an existing older well that was grandfathered in when the Monument was established

H.R. 2215 (Chu), San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act

- This bill would add over 100,000 acres to an Obama-era national monument, create a more than 50,000-acre national recreation area and more than 30,000 acres of wilderness.
- The Monrovia City Council, a city that would be affected by the proposed expansion, opposes the legislation, citing burdensome bureaucracy as a concern.

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