

STATEMENT OF
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On
July 14, 2005

Concerning

H.R. 233 – The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act
H.R. 1129 – The Pitkin County Land Exchange
H.R. 2720 – The Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act
H.R. 2875 – Public Land Corps Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in order to provide the Department's view on these four bills.

H.R. 233 – The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act

I will limit my remarks to the provisions of the bill related to lands managed by the US Forest Service and will defer to the Department of the Interior on provisions relating to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

H.R. 233 would designate certain public lands in Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, Lake, Napa, and Yolo Counties in the State of California as wilderness and certain segments of the Black Butte River in Mendocino County, California as a wild and scenic river. In furthering the purposes of the Wilderness Act (16 U.S. C. 1131 et seq.), this bill would designate as wilderness 114,707 acres in the Mendocino National Forest and 87,815 acres in the Six Rivers National Forest, as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System or as additions to existing components of the system. H.R.233 would also designate 3 sections (21 miles) of the Black Butte River in the Mendocino National Forest as part of the Wild and Scenic River system. We recognize that the bill sponsors have conducted a considerable amount of outreach and worked with a number of communities of interest in the development of H.R. 233. The Department understands that boundary modifications have been made to the proposed wilderness designations since the bill was introduced, and we recognize that some of the concerns raised in our testimony may have already been addressed. The Department would like the opportunity to review the finalized maps which would be cited in the legislation to ensure the accuracy of the National Forest System lands proposed as Wilderness.

The following briefly describes each of the proposed wilderness designations:

- Snow Mountain Wilderness Area Addition (Mendocino NF) –With the addition of two new units, Bear Creek/Deafy Glade and Skeleton Glade, 23,312 additional acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness in the Snow Mountain Wilderness Area. The Department does not oppose the Bear Creek/ Deafy Glade wilderness designation as these units would make good additions to the existing Snow Mountain Wilderness Area given their remoteness and opportunity for solitude. The Department does not oppose the Skeleton Glade wilderness designation, but notes the high costs of hazardous fuels treatments in this area may limit the amount acres that can be efficiently and effectively treated should it designated as wilderness. The Department foresees the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport to accomplish such restoration treatments. The use of these measures or tools would need to be implemented to the maximum extent practicable consistent with maintaining the wilderness character of the area. To this end the Department would like to seek clarification of Section 3 (e) of the bill.

- Sanhedrin Wilderness Area-Proposed (Mendocino NF) –10,571 acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as a new wilderness area. The Department does not oppose this wilderness designation, but notes the high costs of hazardous fuels treatments in this area may limit the amount acres that can be efficiently and effectively treated . The Department foresees the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport to accomplish such restoration treatments. The use of these measures or tools would need to be implemented to the maximum extent practicable consistent with maintaining the wilderness character of the area. To this end the Department would like to seek clarification of Section 3 (e) of the bill.

- Yuki Wilderness Area-Proposed (Mendocino NF) – approximately 53,887 acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness. The current Mendocino National Forest Plan assigned management area prescriptions of Back Country and wilderness to this area. The Department is not opposed to the designation of the Yuki Wilderness Area as proposed.

- Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness (YBMEW) Area Additions (Mendocino NF) –26, 937 acres on National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness. Boundary adjustments have been made to address major cherry-stemming (delineating a road or trail out of the designated wilderness) issues in the Smokehouse Unit of the YBMEW. This unit contains important habitat for connectivity from the Buttermilk Late Successional Reserve and the existing Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness. In addition, the Smokehouse Unit has high scenic quality. The Department is not opposed to the designation of the YBMEW, Smokehouse Unit, as proposed. The Department would not oppose the designation of the Eel River Unit if boundary adjustments are made in the Steel Bench/Blands Cove area to follow the Wild & Scenic corridor line (as reflected in the October 28, 2004 map). The Eel River Unit has high scenic quality.

- Mad River Buttes Wilderness Area – Proposed (Six-Rivers NF) – 6,494 acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness. The area is bordered on three sides by private land which increases the likelihood of motorized access and hinders manageability as wilderness. Over one-third of this proposed wilderness area is matrix lands (2,459 acres), the allocation in the Northwest Forest Plan amendments in which most scheduled timber harvesting

and other silvicultural activities can be conducted. The Department does not support designation as proposed.

- Siskiyou Wilderness Area Additions-Proposed (Six Rivers NF) – 48, 754 acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness with the addition of the Bear Basin Butte, Blue Ridge, Broken Rib, Wooly Bear and Blue Creek wilderness units. All units, with the exception of Blue Creek, are within the Smith River National Recreation Upper South Fork Management Area, where emphasis is on wild river and roadless backcountry recreation. Opportunities for solitude are enhanced due to the adjacency of the Siskiyou Wilderness and the naturalness of the area which has been modified very little. Modifications of the proposed wilderness area boundaries have been made to better follow land features and enhance manageability. The Department is not opposed to the designation of Bear Basin Butte, Blue Ridge, Broken Rib and Wooly Bear Units. The Department would not oppose the designation of the Blue Creek Unit. However, we would prefer boundary adjustments be made to exclude 3,167 acres of matrix lands, the allocation in the Northwest Forest Plan amendments in which most scheduled timber harvesting and other silvicultural activities can be conducted.

- Mt. Lassic Wilderness Area –Proposed (Six Rivers NF) – 7,279 acres of National Forest System lands would be designated as wilderness. Approximately half of the Lassics Botanical Area – a forest plan allocation to protect rare and endangered plants – is within the Mt. Lassic proposed wilderness area. Two user-created motorized routes totaling two miles are within the proposed wilderness area. The Department is not opposed to this designation. If the future designation process decision is to designate the two routes as part of the system, then the above mentioned routes would have to be cherry stemmed within the wilderness through subsequent legislation.

- Trinity Alps Wilderness Area Addition - Proposed (Six Rivers NF) – 28,805 acres of National Forest System land would be designated as wilderness. The natural integrity of the Horse Linto, East Fork and Red Cap proposed units have all generally been maintained and offer an opportunity for solitude and remoteness. The Department is not opposed to the designation of these three units, as proposed. The Department does not support the designation of the Orleans Mountain Unit (Boise Creek). This area is not contiguous to the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area and is located approximately six miles southeast from the town of Orleans (a community at risk). The proposed unit contains 5,707 acres of matrix lands, the allocation in the Northwest Forest Plan amendments in which most scheduled timber harvesting and other silvicultural activities can be conducted.

- Underwood Wilderness Area – Proposed (Six Rivers NF) – 2,977 acres of National Forest System land would be designated as wilderness. The Six Rivers Forest Plan management area prescription for the area is Adaptive Management Area and is located adjacent to the 1.5 mile threat zone for a Community at Risk. Approximately one-third of the western portion of the area is currently managed under a wild river designation (Trinity River). In addition, the proposed wilderness area contains 659 acres of matrix lands, the allocation in the Northwest Forest Plan amendments in which most scheduled timber harvesting and other silvicultural activities can be conducted. The Department does not support the designation of the Underwood Wilderness Area.

- The Black Butte River Wild and Scenic River Designation (Mendocino NF) – Twenty-one miles of the proposed Black Butte River would be designated a Wild and Scenic river. Along the main stretch, 16 miles would be designated as a wild river and 3.5 miles as a scenic river; and along the Cold Creek tributary, 1.5 miles would be designated as a wild river for a total of 21 miles. The 1995 Mendocino National Forest Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement found the Black Butte River eligible for designation due to its outstanding cultural and fisheries habitat resources. The Department is not opposed to the designation as proposed.

Section 3(k) would require the Secretaries to ensure that Indian tribes have access to wilderness areas for traditional, cultural, and religious purposes. In carrying out this provision, the Secretaries would be authorized upon request of an Indian tribe, to temporarily close to the general public the use of portions of areas designated by the bill to protect the privacy of traditional cultural and religious activities in the area by members of an Indian Tribe. We understand that implementation of this provision is at the discretion of the Secretary to determine whether the requested closure is appropriate and that providing access would be to the extent practicable in order to maintain the wilderness character.

We look forward to working with the Committee towards enactment of the bill. Finally, the Department would also like the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the committee on the submission of amendments pertaining to Section 6 (b) in the bill; These amendments would require a fire management plan and report on the cultural and historical resources within the Black Butte River segments designated in the bill in order to insure these provisions are aligned with current policies and laws and are not duplicative.