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WILD MONONGAHELA ACT

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**SPEAKER:** Mr. ROCKEFELLER

**TEXT:** [\*539]

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Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Wild Monongahela: A National Legacy for West Virginia's Special Places Act. This important piece of legislation sets aside over 47,000 acres of **wilderness** in the Monongahela National Forest so that our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to enjoy the forest in its pristine state.

West Virginians have a proud tradition of mining and logging that provides needed resources for our entire country. I have no doubt that this tradition will continue for many decades [\*540]

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to come. However, at the same time, new development is coming to West Virginia. This is needed development that provides jobs for West Virginians and helps support our economy. But with this increased development comes a responsibility to set some part of our natural environment aside for those who come after us.

The Monongahela Forest encompasses nearly 920,000 acres of land in the heart of the Appalachian Mountain Range and contains some of the most ecological and geological unique reaches of our State. There are currently five **wilderness** areas in the Monongahela including the Cranberry **Wilderness** and Dolly Sods **Wilderness**. This bill will create four new **wilderness** areas and expand three of the existing areas. All of the land being designated as **wilderness** was already being treated as either recommended **wilderness** by the Forest Service or as backcountry recreation.

I want to extend my thanks to Congressman Rahall for his leadership on this bill and congratulate him on drafting legislation that has received the support of West Virginia's entire bipartisan congressional delegation. Like all members of the congressional delegation, I have heard from hundreds of West Virginians how **wilderness** is important to them. I have heard how **wilderness** is a major draw for the outdoor tourism industry and will provide jobs. I have heard from West Virginians who want to make sure that they will be able to continue to fish pristine streams and hunt in the forests. They want to experience the excellent hiking and backpacking the hills of West Virginia have to offer, and make sure their grandchildren have that same opportunity. But the reason I heard more than any others from West Virginians was the need to protect some small part of God's creation as His stewards on this Earth.

This legislation has received support from diverse groups and people across West Virginia including the West Virginia AFL-CIO, the Fayette County Commission, West Virginia Council of Churches, and both the Pocahontas and Greenbrier County Conventions and Visitor Bureaus, just to name a few. I know that there will be people who feel that this legislation is too big and goes too far. At the same time I recognize those West Virginians who are disappointed that areas of the Monongahela Forest special to them were not included. But I believe this legislation strikes a careful balance that will protect West Virginia's forests and serve our State's interests for generations to come.