



November 20, 2013

Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Sierra Club's 2.1 million members and supporters across the country, I want to thank you and the Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee for your continued work to protect American lands, water, and wildlife.

Tomorrow's hearing includes two bills that would establish new wilderness areas and one that would establish a large national conservation area. Congress has not established new wilderness since 2009 and this hearing is a step in the right direction toward crafting a bipartisan package that protects America's wild legacy. We look forward to working with you and members of this committee to continue moving these bills forward.

The hearing also includes two bills, S. 339 and S. 1479, that would privatize public lands and increase intensive logging across our country's forests. These bills would be poison pills and would severely hamper the ability of any lands package to pass the full Senate.

The Sierra Club urges you to support the following bills and help move them forward:

- **S. 483, Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act** would protect one of northern California's best kept secrets. The Berryessa Snow Mountain NCA would protect approximately 350,000 acres in a region that acts as a wonderful natural outdoor playground within an hour's drive of Sacramento and the bay area. S. 483 highlights the values of this special place and would make it more accessible to those seeking to escape to the great outdoors while providing the management necessary to safeguard the region's landscapes. An NCA designation is a perfect complement to the region's agricultural economy and will provide a stronger economic foundation that will bring jobs to the region. Permanently protecting the Berryessa Snow Mountain region will safeguard the natural heritage and provide important opportunities to expand the region's economic base by increasing tourism and recreation and creating a more desirable place for people to live and work.

- **S. 776, Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act** would designate 45,000 acres in New Mexico's Carson National Forest as wilderness. The area is already managed as wilderness and protects the headwaters for the Rio Hondo and Red Rivers, both which ultimately flow into the Rio Grande. The area is vital both to the communities of northern New Mexico as well as the wildlife such as bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer for which it provides vital habitat. The bill is widely supported both locally and nationally and the area has been waiting more than 30 years for Congressional protections.
- **S. 841, Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act** would protect the various cultural, economic and ecological resources of well over 100,000 acres of the Hermosa Creek Watershed in the San Juan National Forest. The area is extremely popular for hiking, camping, skiing, biking, hunting and a wide variety of other uses and is some of the most biologically diverse forestland in Colorado. Approximately 37,000 acres of this would be designated wilderness and the legislation would also provide for a mineral withdrawal of over 13,000 additional acres. The bill has wide local support from county commissioners, water conservation districts, hunters and anglers, as well as the conservation community.
- **S. 771, Soledad Canyon Settlement Act** would finally resolve a longstanding dispute over a controversial proposed gravel mine near the City of Santa Clarita. The bill would accomplish this by cancelling CEMEX USA's contracts with the Bureau of Land Management to mine up to five million tons of sand and gravel per year from the Soledad Canyon site, underlying lands owned by the City of Santa Clarita, and permanently withdraw the area from mining. The withdrawal would ensure the continued protection of the significant natural resources of Soledad Canyon. Soledad Canyon is located in an area adjacent to the Upper Santa Clara River that is touted by the National Park Service as containing some of the best remaining tracts of big-cone Douglass fir-canyon oak forest, riparian forest and woodland, coastal sage scrub, and alluvial fan sage scrub.

The mark-up also includes two bills that are highly controversial both locally and nationally. These bills have not undergone thorough review and are not broadly supported. The Sierra Club *strongly opposes* the following:

- **S. 339, Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act** is a piece of special interest legislation that would give about 2400 acres of public lands in Arizona's Tonto National Forest to a foreign mining corporation. These lands are sacred to Native Americans, ecologically significant, and highly valued by recreationalists. The corporation, Resolution Copper, plans to turn the land into a large underground copper mine by using a process which would create a crater three-quarters of a mile wide and 300-400 feet deep. Part of this area was set aside from mineral exploration and extraction for public use by President Eisenhower by Public Land Order 1229, an order that was reinforced by President Nixon. Overturning the executive order for the benefit of foreign mining companies sets a dangerous precedent for religious freedom and public lands protection.

Not only would the bill trade away a sacred area and one that is critical for cultural activities, it would also trade away the Oak Flat Campground and surrounding lands

which are prized by countless climbers, birders, and hikers from nearby Phoenix and all over the country. This would represent an enormous loss for those recreationalists and also the small businesses that earn their livelihood from that recreation. The bill would also result in the massive dewatering of the riparian area and the loss of habitat critical to rare and endangered plants and animals. For these reasons and many more the bill is largely opposed both by the local communities and both local and national conservationists, preservationists, recreationalists, and Native American tribes and tribal organizations. Those include the Navajo Nation, the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, the Inter Tribal Council of Nevada, the National Congress of American Indians, the All Indian Pueblo Council, the United South Eastern Tribes, and tribes throughout Arizona, New Mexico and California.

- **S. 1479, Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act** would act as a Trojan horse for mandating or incentivizing damaging logging and other intensive development of our public lands under the guise of wildfire management, regardless of whether such activities reduce wildfire risk. This bill proposes to dramatically increase the areas of our national forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land that can be logged or developed with limited public review, while also eliminating protections for roadless areas, wilderness study areas, endangered and threatened species habitat, and other ecologically sensitive areas, along with making major changes to the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for listing decisions, recovery plans, and critical habitat designations. S. 1479 authorizes and incentivizes projects in remote backcountry areas of our public land, thereby diverting increasingly scarce resources away from forest-adjacent communities (otherwise known as the wildland-urban interface area or “WUI”) where public safety needs are greatest, thereby potentially increasing fire risk for such communities.

Sincerely,

Debbie Sease
Federal Campaign Director