

**Statement of  
Mike Pool  
Deputy Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
Department of the Interior  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
H.R. 41, Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act of 2011  
October 25, 2011**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on H.R. 41, the Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act of 2011. H.R. 41 significantly expands the Beauty Mountain Wilderness established by the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (P.L. 111-11). The Department welcomes the opportunity to enhance protection for this important area and supports this wilderness expansion. We would also like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on minor and technical amendments to the bill, and note that the BLM can administratively accomplish the placement of recreational facilities described in the bill. The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture regarding the expansion of the Agua Tibia Wilderness involving National Forest System Lands.

**Background**

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act (P.L. 111-11) designated the Beauty Mountain Wilderness on 15,600 acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Riverside County, California. This designation constituted the northern half of the Beauty Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) within Riverside County; the law did not address the southern half of Beauty Mountain within San Diego County.

The Beauty Mountain area supports a rich complement of wildlife species because of its location within the transition zone from the oak woodlands and mountain chaparral of the eastern edge of the Peninsular Range to the creosote bush scrub at the western edge of the Colorado Desert. Home to several threatened or endangered desert species, these public lands enhance important wildlife corridors and landscape connections to the expansive Anza Borrego Desert State Park. Within an hour's drive of the major population centers of San Diego and Riverside, this area is a popular destination for a variety of dispersed outdoor recreational activities including camping, hiking, horseback riding and hunting.

**H.R. 41**

H.R. 41 enlarges the existing Beauty Mountain Wilderness by approximately 14,000 acres. The expansion of the wilderness area is critical to maintain open space and to protect this significant area of chaparral, canyons and forest in northern San Diego County. In 2007 and 2008, the BLM testified in support of the wilderness designation of Beauty Mountain, but noted that the southern boundary of the area was arbitrarily cut off at the county line. We welcome the completion of this wilderness area provided for in this legislation.

H.R. 41 represents several years of collaborative effort by Representative Issa that involved close coordination with elected officials, environmental organizations, community groups, adjacent

landowners, and concerned individuals in San Diego County. Representative Issa worked diligently to seek consensus on the wilderness expansion from all segments of the public as well as private landowners adjacent to the wilderness.

There are several minor amendments to H.R. 41 that we would like to address. First, the BLM prepared a new map for Congressman Issa last year, dated March 2, 2010. This map more accurately reflects current land status showing the recent acquisition of private lands (largely through donation to the Federal government) within the proposed wilderness area. We recommend that the bill be updated to reference the new map from 2010, which reflects a wilderness addition of just over 14,000 acres.

Additionally, the BLM would like the opportunity to work on technical language modifications for consistency with other wilderness legislation. Finally, while we do not object to the intent of section 201 regarding the placement of recreational facilities such as a campground, parking areas and related facilities on adjacent lands, we prefer that these proposals be analyzed through the land management planning process, which includes public input and review. We request that it not be included in legislative language as it may reduce the agency's flexibility in the future. The BLM recommends that these issues instead be addressed in Committee report language.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of the provisions of H.R. 41 regarding the expansion of the Beauty Mountain Wilderness. I will be happy to answer any questions.