

**Statement of
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Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
S. 342, Pine Forest Range Recreation Enhancement Act
April 25, 2013**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 342, the Pine Forest Range Recreation Enhancement Act. The Department of the Interior supports S. 342, which designates the Pine Forest Range Wilderness in Humboldt County, Nevada, on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). We urge the Congress to move swiftly to pass this bill.

It is gratifying to see Congress moving to protect this area that was highlighted in Secretary Salazar's November 2011 *Preliminary Report on BLM Lands Deserving Protection as National Conservation Areas, Wilderness or Other Conservation Designations*. There is a long history of bipartisan support in Congress for the conservation of America's special places. Members from both parties have been essential to passing every major public lands bill that has been enacted in recent years. This type of cooperative and bipartisan approach to designating special lands for protection as wilderness, national conservation areas, or similar designations has historically been a regular practice for Congress. The designation of the Pine Forest Range has strong support from County government and local citizens. It is a wonderful example of how people can come together to protect one of America's real gems.

Background

The Pine Forest Range in northern Nevada's arid Great Basin is a rare and exceptional area of abundant streams and clear, cold subalpine lakes. Nestled in a cirque and fed by snowmelt and springs, these lakes are not only visually stunning but also possess an excellent trout fishery. The lakes are surrounded by a rare remnant population of white bark and limber pines. Stands of quaking aspen and mountain mahogany are also found throughout the proposed wilderness. Fall brings an abundance of color found in few other places in northern Nevada.

The spectacular scenery and vistas, combined with outstanding recreational opportunities, draw thousands of visitors annually. Despite being one of the most highly visited recreational areas in the region, the proposed wilderness still appears pristine. Day hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, and camping are all popular in the area. Visitors enjoy a true primitive recreation experience, without trails or facilities. Even during peak visitation periods, solitude is easy to find in the rugged terrain. Abundant wildlife coveted by sportsmen includes trophy mule deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, and chukar.

A wide range of stakeholders began working cooperatively in 2009 and 2010 to bring together diverse interests in a grass-roots effort to protect this special area. In the fall of 2010, the Humboldt County Commission voted unanimously to approve the final recommendations of the Pine Forest Range Working Group to designate the Pine Forest Range Wilderness. The Nevada

State Legislature subsequently passed a resolution praising the process used in arriving at the consensus represented by S. 342.

S. 342

S. 342 proposes to designate the 26,000-acre Pine Forest Range Wilderness in Humboldt County, Nevada, on public land managed by the BLM. This wilderness area is largely formed by the Blue Lakes and Alder Creek Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Under the bill, approximately 1,150 acres of land within those WSAs would not be designated as wilderness and would be released from WSA status, thereby allowing the consideration of other uses.

Section 7 of S. 342 provides for land exchanges to improve the manageability of the Pine Forest Range Wilderness Area and nearby public lands while likewise allowing private landowners the opportunity to consolidate their holdings. The land exchanges are discretionary and would be completed consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and other applicable laws. The BLM supports this provision. In addition, these land acquisitions may be undertaken through existing authorities such as purchase or donation.

The Pine Forest Range Wilderness meets the definition of wilderness; the land and its community of life are largely untrammled. It has retained its primeval character and has been influenced primarily by the forces of nature, with outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation or solitude. The BLM strongly supports this designation. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on some minor technical modifications.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 342 . We look forward to the swift passage of this legislation designating the Pine Forest Range Wilderness.