

**Statement of Tom Fulton
Deputy Assistant Secretary– Land and Minerals Management
Department of the Interior
House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
on H.R. 2488, Pilot Range Wilderness**

July 26, 2001

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding H.R. 2488. The Department appreciates Chairman Hansen's efforts in continuing to address wilderness in Utah. The Department of the Interior supports H.R. 2488, which designates over 37,000 acres of land in western Utah as wilderness. We would like the opportunity to work with the Committee on clarifying and technical amendments to the legislation before the Committee completes its consideration of this bill.

The proposed Pilot Range Wilderness Area lies in Box Elder County, Utah. Rising to over 10,761 feet, Pilot Peak served as a beacon for travelers headed to California in the 1840s and, for some, a beacon of false hope. Travelers who had completed the hot, dry trek across the Great Salt Lake Desert found water in the springs along the eastern base of the range.

Located approximately 115 miles northwest of Salt Lake City, along the Utah and Nevada state line, the Pilots are a north-south trending mountain range, with canyons draining east to a large alkali flat, and west to a broad valley that extends into Nevada. The rugged terrain (ridges, side canyons and valley bottoms) meets the requirements of the Wilderness Act. Diverse vegetation complements the topography by providing screening from human activity. Opportunities for hunting, camping, hiking, and photography are outstanding. Horseback riding and pack trips are abundant throughout the area.

The Pilot Range also meets the scenic and natural resource values required in the Wilderness Act. Elk, bighorn sheep, and deer roam throughout, and the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout are present in Bettridge Creek in the southern part of the proposed wilderness.

The Pilot Range was not included as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) wilderness inventory completed in 1980. The checkerboard ownership pattern of the lands did not originally lend itself to that designation. However, between 1989 and 1993, the BLM concluded a series of land exchanges with willing private landowners that consolidated public ownership in the Pilot Range. A subsequent BLM wilderness inventory, concluded in 1999, found the area to have significant wilderness characteristics.

Last fall, Congress passed the Utah West Desert Land Exchange Act (Public Law 106-301), which exchanged over 200,000 acres of state and federal lands. Included in that exchange were 3,600 acres of State land within the Pilot Range. With that acquisition, the area proposed for wilderness in this bill contains no state inholdings.

We would like the opportunity to work with the Committee to make technical corrections or clarify a number of provisions in the bill. For example, the current language in section 2(b) regarding incorporating acquired private lands into the proposed Wilderness should be modified to clarify that only acquired private lands with wilderness character would be added to the Pilot Range Wilderness.

Section 1(a) of the bill specifies a map of the wilderness area. We would like the opportunity to work with Chairman Hansen on that map before H.R. 2488 is reported out of Committee. It is also our understanding that the Chairman may be proposing some modifications to the acreage of the wilderness area and we would like the opportunity to work with the Committee on those changes.

In July 1998, the Box Elder County Commission developed an access road management plan. This plan is a product of recommendations made by a team sponsored by Box Elder County with the benefit of public review, including input from BLM. The BLM then adopted this ordinance through a Federal Register notice. We would like the opportunity to work with the Committee to ensure that the map is consistent with the county's road management plan.

We would also like to work with the Committee on section 2(f) of the bill regarding protection of military needs on the nearby Utah Test and Training Range and Dugway Proving Ground. We are in complete agreement on the importance of the mission of these military bases. The language of section 2(f) of this bill must adequately provide for military interests while protecting the wilderness resources and BLM's management of the wilderness area. For example, we would like to consider expanding the scope of the proposed memorandum of understanding (MOU) to include all aspects of military use in the proposed Pilot Range Wilderness, including placement of and access to communications and tracking systems.

In addition, we would like to work with the Committee to incorporate provisions into the bill to ensure the protection of the Lahontan cutthroat trout (listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act) and its habitat. Also, because Public Law 106-65 (October 5, 1999) prohibits land use planning on BLM lands within the Utah Test and Training Range, we would like to work with the Committee to add language to clarify Congressional direction in this matter.

Finally, the reference to section 4(d)(7) of the Wilderness Act in section 2(c) of this bill should be to section 4(d)(8) of the Wilderness Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 2488, I am pleased to answer any questions that the Committee may have.