

**Statement of  
Chad Calvert  
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management  
Department of the Interior  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests  
Hearing on S. 738, Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act  
July 21, 2004**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 738, the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act. I will confine my remarks to those provisions of the bill which relate to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and will defer to the Department of Agriculture on provisions regarding lands managed by the Forest Service. While we will propose a number of amendments to S. 738, if those amendments are made, the Department of the Interior will support this legislation as it relates to BLM-managed lands.

This Administration strongly supports the efforts of members of Congress to work together with their local constituents to find solutions to the lingering Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Only Congress can determine the final status of WSAs—whether to designate as wilderness or release lands from WSA status. The WSA issue is one that should be resolved and we always stand ready to work with Members of Congress toward solutions.

S. 738 proposes to designate as wilderness nearly 120,000 acres of BLM-managed lands in California's 1st Congressional District. Because wilderness boundaries do not follow Congressional District boundaries, this has resulted in a few awkward provisions in the legislation that we will point out. Overall, we support the designations, but recommend some changes to the management language which we hope the committee will consider.

The areas proposed for designation include stunning landscapes, dramatic coastlines, and unique habitats. Taken together, these proposed wilderness areas include pristine Pacific Coast, steep inland canyons, rushing whitewater and mountainous terrain. The array of wildlife is incredibly diverse. Large mammals such as elk, sea lions, and black bear populate these areas. Various raptors including the endangered northern spotted owl, peregrine falcons and eagles nest here. Additionally, the areas provide significant habitat for steelhead, coho, and Chinook salmon, all listed endangered species. Recreational use is varied and scattered throughout the area including rafting, fishing, hiking, camping, and hunting, all of which will continue after designation.

A brief description of each proposed wilderness designation is in order:

- King Range Wilderness—41,614 acres encompassing both the Chemise Mountain WSA and the King Range WSA would be designated wilderness. This area truly would be a crown jewel of the wilderness system. Its 26 miles of pristine and undeveloped coastline is the longest in the continental United States. Referred to as California's "Lost Coast," this dramatic wilderness area is within the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) established by Congress in 1970.
- Yuki Wilderness--51,790 acres are proposed for wilderness designation including approximately 17,200 acres of BLM-managed lands which include a steep, rugged river corridor. The larger acreage, approximately 35,000 acres, is managed by the Forest Service. We support the designation of the BLM acres (which encompass most of the Thatcher Ridge WSA) as a portion of the overall Yuki Wilderness.
- Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness additions—expands the existing 153,000-acre Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness Area by approximately 26,760 acres (the existing area includes over 7,000 acres of BLM-managed lands). However, only 780 acres of the wilderness addition is

BLM-managed land. We support the designation of these 780 acres as a part of the much larger Forest Service addition.

- Cache Creek Wilderness—the legislation cites 38,970 acres of BLM-managed lands for wilderness. However, if the bill's intention is only to designate lands within Congressional District 1, this designation may be reduced to approximately 31,000 acres. Waters rushing through this area's steep canyons provide popular whitewater rafting venues while the surrounding oak woodlands are home to several herds of tule elk. We support this designation that falls within the Congressional District.
- Blue Ridge Wilderness— a small 760-acre area is proposed for designation by the bill. While it is our understanding that a larger 10,000-acre wilderness is envisioned in this area, only 760 acres of it is within Congressional District 1. We oppose designating such a small area as wilderness because it is too small to manage properly for wilderness values unless land in the adjacent district is included in the wilderness designation.
- Cedar Roughs Wilderness—5,880 acres of BLM WSA is designated as wilderness. We support this designation. The BLM has administratively designated this land as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in recognition of its significant Sargent cypress stand and important black bear population.
- South Fork Eel Wilderness—14,000 acres to be designated encompassing the Red Mountain WSA. The area is home to a number of endangered species including the northern spotted owl and several salmon species as well as some unique and rare geological features. The designation is supported by the BLM.
- Elkhorn Ridge Potential Wilderness Area—8,000 acres of BLM-managed lands are proposed for a "potential wilderness area." Under the terms of the legislation, the area would become wilderness within 5 years, or earlier, if determined by the Secretary of the Interior that appropriate ecological restoration had taken place. This area contains a portion of the Eel River headwaters and provides significant endangered species habitat. While such a designation is unique for the BLM, the National Park Service has experience with such designations and we think it is reasonable.

For those areas in the bill not identified as WSAs, and for the areas in the bill that were determined by the BLM to be non-suitable for wilderness, we note that Congress has plenary authority over the disposition of public lands. Except as otherwise specified, if Congress ultimately approves the bill, we do not see any additional management impediments to their inclusion.

We would like the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the Committee to perfect boundaries in a few cases, and release from WSA status those areas, primarily small bits and pieces of WSAs (our current estimate is around 2,200 acres), that are not designated wilderness by S. 738. Leaving those pieces unaddressed creates potential management problems.

We would also like the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the Committee on the management language in the bill. Specifically, we recommend adding standard language on the management of newly-acquired lands within the wilderness area and a full withdrawal of the lands designated as wilderness. The Department strongly recommends the legislation be amended to clarify that the wilderness designation not constitute or be construed to constitute either an express or implied reservation of any water rights. Additional technical matters on maps should also be addressed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the sections of S. 738 which apply to BLM-managed lands. The resolution of these longstanding WSA questions is a priority for the Department and we welcome the opportunity to move this debate forward.

I would be happy to answer any questions.