

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
United States Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 3069, Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act
July 16, 2008**

Thank you for inviting me to testify on S. 3069, the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act. The designations included in S. 3069 are largely on National Forest System lands and we defer to the Department of Agriculture on designations on lands predominantly under their jurisdiction. The Department of the Interior supports the proposed Wild & Scenic River designation on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and, with modifications, the proposed Granite Mountain Wilderness area to be managed by the BLM.

S. 3069 is a wide-ranging bill which designates nearly half a million acres of wilderness, 52 miles of Wild & Scenic River, and a number of special management areas in the Eastern Sierra region of California. We will limit ourselves to a discussion of those designations directly affecting BLM-managed lands, specifically the proposed Amargosa Wild & Scenic River and the proposed Granite Mountain Wilderness, as well as the release of several BLM-managed Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Additionally, we will address those portions of the proposed White Mountain Wilderness and John Muir Wilderness Additions that are managed by the BLM.

The BLM supports that portion of section 6 of S. 3069 that designates approximately 26 miles of the BLM-managed Amargosa River under the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. This designation is consistent with BLM planning and has strong local backing. Five separate segments of the Amargosa are designated including one wild segment, two scenic segments, and two recreational segments. The Amargosa, known locally as the “Crown Jewel of the Mojave Desert,” is the only free-flowing river in the Death Valley area and as such provides a rare and lush riparian space in the desert. This proposed Wild & Scenic River designation is the result of a grassroots community-based effort through cooperative conservation.

Section 3 of S. 3069 designates a number of areas as wilderness, including one that is primarily on BLM-managed lands, and section 5 releases all or part of four BLM WSAs to a wider range of multiple uses. The Department strongly supports Congressional efforts to resolve wilderness designations throughout the West, and we welcome this opportunity to further those efforts. Only Congress can determine whether to designate WSAs as wilderness or release them for other uses. We would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on some technical modifications to the wilderness management language to assure consistency.

The proposed 35,564 acre Granite Mountain Wilderness lies primarily on BLM-managed lands (approximately 2,700 acres are within the Inyo National Forest). This is an area of stunning vistas: to the northwest is Mono Lake with a spectacular backdrop of the Great Basin, and the Sierra Nevada range soars to the skyline with snowcapped peaks and granite spires. Wildlife

values are high and the area abounds with raptor nesting sites and provides an intact natural corridor for deer during critical seasonal migrations.

We support the designation and would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on possible minor boundary adjustments to ensure efficient manageability. In addition, we would like the opportunity to prepare the map of the Granite Mountain Wilderness to be referenced in the legislation.

The Department is concerned about ensuring that consideration is given to energy potential when any legislative proposal for special designation is considered. The BLM has reviewed the traditional and renewable energy values of the DOI portions of the Granite Mountain Wilderness proposed for designation and has determined that there is low or no potential for energy development within the area.

The legislation also releases several WSAs and returns them to a wider range of multiple public uses as prescribed in BLM's Bishop Resource Management Plan. Specifically, the bill releases the 6,493 acre Masonic Mountain WSA, the 7,721 acre Mormon Meadow WSA, the 12,840 acre Walford Springs WSA, and those portions of the Granite Mountain WSA not designated by this bill, approximately 22,481 acres. We support these Congressional efforts to resolve WSA status. In addition, we recommend the release of the 760 acres of the White Mountains WSA that are not designated as wilderness by this bill.

Finally, S. 3069 designates as wilderness several areas of BLM-managed land that are contiguous to much larger areas of National Forest System lands designated as wilderness in this bill. The proposed 80,000-acre John Muir Wilderness Additions include five small BLM parcels totaling 780 acres. The proposed 223,500-acre White Mountains Wilderness includes five small BLM parcels totaling 1,200 acres on the western edge of the proposed wilderness and one large 22,300 acre area on the eastern edge. We defer to the Forest Service on the larger issue of designation of the John Muir Wilderness Additions and the White Mountains Wilderness.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 3069 as it affects BLM-managed lands. I'll be glad to answer any questions.