

**Statement of
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Department of the Interior
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 1774, Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act
March 22, 2012**

Thank you for the invitation to testify on S. 1774, the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act which designates approximately 208,000 acres of Federal land in Montana as the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Management Area. S. 1774 primarily affects lands managed by the United States Forest Service (FS). The Department of the Interior defers to the Department of Agriculture regarding designations on lands managed by the FS. Over 13,000 of the acres proposed for special designation under the bill are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Department of the Interior supports the designation of the BLM lands as part of the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Management Area (CMA).

Background

A unique and stunningly beautiful area in west-central Montana, the Rocky Mountain Front is located within Pondera, Teton, and Lewis and Clark Counties and contains unparalleled cultural, recreational, scenic, and biological resources. The lands administered by the BLM are dominated by massive limestone cliffs rising to an elevation of 7,700 feet and include grasslands, shrub lands, and limber and white-bark pine forests. Numerous wildlife and fish populations are supported by the highly varied topography and diverse vegetation that for generations has provided an outstanding experience for hunters, anglers and other recreationists. Hunttable populations of elk, mule deer, big horn sheep, mountain goats and black bear all occur within the area being considered in the proposed legislation. In addition, threatened species including grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and bull trout are found on these BLM-managed lands.

Congress recognized this priceless region in 2006 when it included the withdrawal of the entire area from new mining claims and mineral leasing in section 403(a) of Public Law 109-432. The BLM currently manages these lands for their important resource values as administratively-designated Outstanding Natural Areas (Blind Horse, Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain and Deep Creek-Battle Creek).

S. 1774

S. 1774 designates over 200,000 acres of federal land in Montana's Rocky Mountain Front as the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Management Area. Approximately 13,000 acres of public land managed by the BLM would be included in that designation. Running along the eastern edge of the CMA, the lands managed by the BLM are largely closed to motorized access and include a trail system popular with those seeking a wilder recreational experience.

The overall management scheme envisioned for the CMA is consistent with current BLM management of these lands. Under the provisions of S. 1774, motorized vehicles within the

CMA would be limited to roads and trails designated for their use and grazing would be allowed to continue where it currently exists.

The BLM recommends that the bill be amended to specify that the BLM-managed lands within the CMA be included in the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The CMA is very similar to BLM's National Conservation Areas (NCAs) and inclusion in the NLCS is appropriate.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 1774 as it applies to lands managed by the BLM.