

**Statement of  
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Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
H.R. 5132, Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act  
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 5132, the Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act. The bill modifies the eastern boundary of the Deschutes Canyon-Steelhead Falls Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in Jefferson County, Oregon, and releases approximately 832 acres from WSA management. The Department of the Interior recognizes the significant work of various stakeholders to attempt to reach a consensus on the future management of public lands in this area, particularly with respect to balancing the protection of unique resources within the WSA with actions to address wildland fire risk for nearby communities. While we share the sponsor's interest in hazardous fuels reduction and preventing wildfires that may impact the communities surrounding this WSA, we have technical concerns with the legislation as described below.

The Department notes that this bill was introduced fewer than two weeks ago, and we have not had sufficient time to undertake the thorough review that is appropriate for a hearing on this matter. Based on an initial analysis of the bill and its accompanying legislative map, the exact lands proposed for release from WSA management are unclear, as well as the extent to which the proposal meets the objectives of interested stakeholders. We would welcome the opportunity, in cooperation with the sponsor, to create a legislative map for the purposes of this bill that reflects land status data and delineates the proposed boundary more clearly. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to address a few technical and minor concerns with the bill, and we look forward to continuing to work with local stakeholders to resolve land management issues within and surrounding the WSA.

**Background**

The Deschutes Canyon-Steelhead Falls WSA was part of the original intensive wilderness inventory conducted in 1978 by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Oregon. This WSA is a long narrow area located along the upper Deschutes River, within and adjacent to the Forest Service-administered Crooked River National Grasslands, and consists of approximately 10,230 acres of forest lands managed by the Forest Service and approximately 3,240 acres of public land managed by the BLM. The area is surrounded by the Crooked River Ranch (a private subdivision) to the east, Lake Billy Chinook to the north, low-density rural populations to the south, and farmlands to the west. The portions of the Deschutes River within this WSA have been protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act since 1988.

Within the WSA, the beauty and wildness of the Deschutes River canyon increases with the change in elevation as one proceeds north toward Lake Billy Chinook. Once within the Deschutes or Squaw Creek canyons, one's attention shifts from the roar and rapid movement of

the water, to the vibrant green and red hues of riparian vegetation along the river bank and also to the scenic canyon walls towering above this river environment. These multicolored walls leave the visitor with a lasting impression that these formations were bisected by the Deschutes River over several thousand years.

### **H.R. 5132, the Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act**

H.R. 5132 requires the Secretary of the Interior to reduce the size of the Deschutes Canyon-Steelhead Falls WSA by approximately 832 acres to “facilitate fire prevention and response activities to protect adjacent private property, and for other purposes.” By releasing these 832 acres from WSA status, this area would be managed by the BLM for the full range of non-wilderness multiple uses under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

The BLM notes that under FLPMA, the Wilderness Act, and agency policy, mechanical vegetation treatments, including pre-fire treatments, are allowed in WSAs as long as they meet the non-impairment standard or its emergency or restoration exceptions. The BLM shares the sponsor’s goal of reducing fire threats that may impact the life and safety of people and private property near the WSA. The BLM also recognizes the significant work of a broad section of stakeholders to reach a consensus on the future management of public lands in this area, particularly with respect to balancing the protection of unique resources within the WSA with actions to address wildland fire risk.

Based on an initial review of the bill and the legislative map, the proposed boundary is not clearly delineated and we are unsure exactly which lands the sponsor intends to release from WSA management. It is also unclear whether the boundary modification would affect parts of this area currently managed by the Forest Service. We would welcome the opportunity to create a legislative map for the purposes of this bill that reflects land status data and more clearly identifies which lands would be released from WSA management. Finally, we would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to address a number of minor and technical concerns with the bill, including the mechanics of the WSA release and possible further boundary adjustments to enhance manageability and ensure the continued protection of Steelhead Falls.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of the Interior looks forward to working with the sponsor, the Subcommittee, and stakeholders on public land management issues raised in this legislation and to address the specific concerns noted in our testimony. I would be happy to answer your questions.