

REMOVE PUBLIC LANDS PROVISIONS FROM THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

December 7, 2014

Honorable Members
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

The undersigned organizations urge you to take action to remove Title XXX, “Natural Resources Related General Provisions” from the Carl Levin and Howard P. ‘Buck’ McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015.

Title XXX would result in a net loss of wildland and wildlife protection on tens of millions of acres of public land. The provisions would undermine some of our nation’s preeminent environmental and public lands laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Wilderness Act, would give landscapes deemed sacred by Native American tribes to a foreign-owned mining company, and would diminish the federal estate held in trust for all Americans as an important part of our natural birthright.

Though certainly not an exhaustive list, the following provisions exemplify the problems with the bill:

Sec. 3002, Sealaska Land Entitlement Finalization, would give away 70,000 acres of the Tongass National Forest to Sealaska, a Native Corporation notorious for some of the worst logging practices in Southeast Alaska. The land giveaway would settle land claims outside the selection area Sealaska Corporation was assigned under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Nearly all of the 70,000 acres of forests, including ancient forests, are likely to be logged with minimal environmental regulation. This giveaway has faced strong opposition from grassroots Southeast Alaska conservation groups, many Native people, and communities that would be harmed by intensive clearcutting and the loss of forest habitat.

Sec. 3003, Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation, would trade 2,400 acres of national forest land protected by Executive Order in 1955 to Resolution Copper, a foreign-controlled mining company, in order to facilitate the development of a copper mine that has long been opposed by local interests. The lands are considered sacred by Native American tribes, who have successfully fought the land trade for years.

Sec. 3009, Northern Nevada Land Conveyances. This part of the bill encompasses several sales and conveyances of public land, including the sale of over 11,500 acres to the town of Yerington to facilitate mining. (Locations and acreages of the public lands near Yerington and several other conveyances are not even provided in the legislation, but cited to a map residing in a local Bureau of Land Management field office).

Sec. 3023, Grazing Permits and Leases, would automatically renew livestock grazing permits on tens of millions of acres of public lands even where grazing operations are

degrading wildlife habitat and fouling streams and rivers. No environmental analysis under NEPA, and no compliance with other applicable laws, would be required at the time of renewal, inhibiting citizens' ability to protect public lands from harm. Sec. 3023 would further exacerbate habitat degradation that imperils the sage grouse and hasten the need for the species' protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Sec. 3064 and 3066, Pine Forest Range Wilderness and Wovoka Wilderness, respectively, would grant exceptions to the Wilderness Act allowing the State of Nevada to routinely land helicopters and manipulate natural habitat conditions in direct contravention of basic tenets of the Wilderness Act. Such provisions diminish the meaning of Wilderness and degrade the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Sec. 3065, Rocky Mountain Front Conservation and Management Area and Wilderness Additions, removes wilderness study area (WSA) protections from two BLM WSAs in eastern Montana, hundreds of miles from the lands involved in the Rocky Mountain Front bill. This stealth provision was inserted in the bill despite never having been publicly discussed nor included in any legislation previously pending before Congress.

While there are provisions relating to public lands that would draw broad support from the conservation community as stand-alone legislation, their inclusion in the Defense authorization bill renders them untenable. This kitchen-sink approach to legislation, lacking in deliberation and shaped solely by political calculus, belies the very serious consequences of the provisions. The price our public lands at large must pay in exchange for a few modest Wildernesses designations is simply too high.

We urge you to oppose the inclusion of Title XXX in the Defense bill and to work to remove the public lands' provisions from this legislation.

Sincerely,

Wilderness Watch
Missoula, MT

Greenpeace
Washington, DC

Western Lands Project
Seattle, WA

WildEarth Guardians
Santa Fe, NM

Center for Biological Diversity
Tucson, AZ

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Salt Lake City, UT

Western Watersheds Project
Hailey, ID

RESTORE: The North Woods
Hallowell, ME

Heartwood
Bloomington, IN

Save America's Forests
Washington, DC

Swan View Coalition
Kalispell, MT

Conservation Congress
Livingston, MT

Los Padres Forest Watch
Santa Barbara, CA

Klamath Forest Alliance
Orleans, CA

North Cascades Conservation Council
Seattle, WA

Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation
Community
Sitka, AK

Californians for Western Wilderness
San Francisco, CA

Wild Virginia
Charlottesville, VA

Yellowstone to Uintas Connection
Paris, ID

Idaho Sporting Congress
Boise, ID

Western Wildlife Conservancy
Salt Lake City, UT

The California Chaparral Institute
Escondido, CA

Alliance for the Wild Rockies
Helena, MT

Friends of the Bitterroot
Hamilton, MT

Kootenai Environmental Alliance
Coeur d'Alene, ID

Friends of the Clearwater
Moscow, ID

Massachusetts Forest Watch
Northampton, MA

Epic-Environmental Protection
Information Center,
Arcata, CA

Kentucky Heartwood
Berea, KY

Montana Environmental Information
Center, Helena, MT

Wild Wilderness
Bend, OR

WildWest Institute
Missoula, MT

River Runners for Wilderness
Flagstaff, AZ

Allegheny Defense Project
Kane, PA

Big Wild Advocates
Emigrant, MT

Big Wild Adventures
Emigrant, MT

Central Sierra Wilderness Watch
Twain Harte, CA

Friends of Bell Smith Springs
Stonefort, IL

High Sierra Hikers Association
South Lake Tahoe, CA

Friends of the Wild Swan
Swan Lake, MT

Montana Ecosystems Defense Council
Kalispell, MT

Wild Utah Project
Salt Lake City, UT

American Wild Horse Preservation
Campaign
Lompoc, CA

WildLands Defense
Boise, ID

Save our Sky Blue Waters
Duluth, MN

Groundwater Awareness League
Green Valley, AZ

Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper
Moab, UT

Dana Thynes, Mayor
City of Kupreanof, AK