

Statement of Glenn Casamassa
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Before the
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining
Concerning
S. 2206, Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act
February 7, 2018

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding S. 2206, the Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act.

Under the Montana Wilderness Study Area Act of 1977, nine areas totaling 973,000 acres were identified as wilderness study areas to be evaluated for designation as wilderness in accordance with the Wilderness Act. As required by the 1977 Act, studies for each of the areas were completed in the early 1980s. The findings in those initial studies were carried forward in the first round of land management planning as either recommendations or non-recommendations for wilderness designation. In response to those recommendations, Congress has designated 171,000 acres as wilderness and released 139,000 acres from the Act. There are 663,000 acres that remain as wilderness study areas until Congress acts.

Since the initial study period, four National Forests in Montana with wilderness study area lands have recently finished or have begun a second study (evaluation) process as required by the Forest Service land management planning regulations. Based on current conditions and public engagement, some forests have proposed changes to the 1980-era recommendations for wilderness designations.

The Department supports S. 2206, as the Forest Service has not recommended that the five areas covered by the bill be designated as wilderness.

If this bill were to be enacted, the Forests would complete the appropriate administrative change for each affected land management plan to remove the wilderness study area designation and associated direction. Management for the released acres would then defer to the remaining applicable plan direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.