

**STATEMENT OF
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**Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING**

Regarding

**S. 1214, State Grazing Management Authority Act
S. 1411, Lander County Land Management and Conservation Act
S. 1459, Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California Lands Act
S. 1493, Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act
S. 1538, Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act
S. 1583, Lake Tahoe Restoration Reauthorization Act
S. 1589, Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act
S. 1631, Arizona Experiment Station Land Conveyance Act of 2021**

October 19, 2021

Chair Cortez Masto, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the U.S. Department of (USDA) Forest Service regarding various public land management bills.

S. 1214, State Grazing Management Authority Act

S. 1214, the State Grazing Management Authority Act, amends Section 402 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to authorize the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into cooperative agreements with States to provide for State administration of allotment management plans on eligible Federal land in the State, including the commencement of a lease or the issuance of a permit for domestic livestock grazing. USDA views regarding S. 1214 only pertain to provisions affecting the Forest Service and National Forest System (NFS) lands. The bill authorizes 30-year terms for cooperative agreements, with the option to renew the permit for an additional 30 years, and any permit or lease for domestic livestock grazing issued by the State agency will be for a 30-year term with limited terms and conditions.

This bill would also give the option for the State to assume the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) responsibilities for the allotment management plans or the identification of cooperating agencies as determined appropriate by the applicable State commission. Under the cooperative agreement, the State can also approve or construct water infrastructure improvements that are appropriate for the improvement of public grazing, adjudicate water rights, share revenue received from grazing fees, and charge additional fees for domestic livestock grazing on land covered by an allotment management plan administered by the State.

This bill also establishes a categorical exclusion under NEPA for these allotment management plans to conduct vegetation restoration projects, pinyon or juniper treatments, changes to allotment grazing, and installation and maintenance of grazing and water infrastructure.

The requirement to rehabilitate lands following a wildfire for areas covered by an allotment management plan needs further clarification to define what is being required for rehabilitation. USDA has concerns with the broad requirement to rehabilitate lands following a wildfire due to unknown costs and assumed shift in prioritization of resources. USDA has concerns with the 60-day timeframe for complex fire investigations and the release of criminal/civil investigation information to the public.

A State entering into a cooperative agreement may also enter into an agreement with any local law enforcement agency for the enforcement of the terms of any permit or lease for domestic livestock grazing on land covered by the cooperative agreement if the area in which the law enforcement agency would act under that agreement is within the jurisdiction of that agency. USDA has concerns with authorizing local law enforcement agencies to enforce federal criminal law relating to grazing.

The Forest Service works productively with grazing permittees, federal and state agencies, and others to ensure that National Forest System lands are managed sustainably for the various multiple uses. USDA appreciates the subcommittee's interest in range management, however it does not support the bill as currently drafted. The proposed language would effectively cede the authority and responsibility for managing federal range lands to the States, creating uncertainty for permittees and shifting substantial costs to state agencies. We believe that this would likely diminish, rather than enhance, the mutual benefits derived from collaborative management of grazing allotments with our permittees. Clarity is needed to avoid uncertainty in balancing grazing with other multiple uses or create contradiction in the application of new authorities. We would like to work with the subcommittee and the bill's sponsor to better understand the bill's goals.

S. 1411, Lander County Land Management and Conservation Act

S. 1411, the Lander County Land Management and Conservation Act, would require conveyance of NFS lands in Lander County, Nevada. USDA views regarding S. 1411 only pertain to

provisions affecting the Forest Service and NFS lands. USDA supports the intent of the act to protect water resources and expand airport capacity to support wildland firefighting and would be happy to work with the county on three of the conveyances shown on the legislative map referred to in the bill. However, we have concerns with the Pony Springs and Marshall Springs parcels given these parcels include Forest Service water rights, greater sage grouse habitat and active grazing allotments. We would like to work with the bill sponsors and subcommittee to identify other options for meeting the intent of these conveyances.

In addition, USDA has concerns related to the specific details for the proposed conveyances, including the required reversionary clause, prescribed time frames associated with the conveyance, and how the legislation proposes to resolve conflicts between the maps, acreage estimates and legal descriptions. We would like to work with the bill sponsors and subcommittee to refine the specific language around the conveyance processes.

S. 1459, Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act

USDA supports the goals of S. 1459, the Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act and would like to work with the subcommittee and bill sponsor to address some technical and timing concerns.

As a general matter, USDA would like to ensure that any new wild and scenic river designations are properly integrated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with enough time to develop comprehensive river management plans (CRMPs) and to establish detailed boundaries in cooperation with Tribes, State and local governments, and interested stakeholders. The timeframes identified under Sections 3(b) and 3(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act for completing detailed boundaries and CRMPs could be challenging to meet. We would like to work with the subcommittee and bill sponsors to identify ways to support timely completion of CRMP and boundary requirements.

In this testimony, we address proposed designations on lands administered by the Forest Service. We defer to the Department of the Interior regarding the designations on the lands and interests administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

Title I - Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests

Title I addresses restoration needs, recreation, and land conservation on federal lands in California. It accomplishes these goals through forest restoration activities, authorizing new partnerships for various activities, and requiring that fire management planning be incorporated into the land management plan revision process. Title I also adds or potentially modifies recreation trail systems, designates new wilderness areas, creates additions to existing wildernesses, and designates certain rivers in California as wild and scenic rivers.

USDA understands the overarching intent of this legislation is to recognize the importance of wilderness areas, recreation, and wild and scenic rivers. We would like to work with the subcommittee and sponsor of this bill to ensure that these proposals are crafted in a way that best supports the intent of this bill.

Subtitle A

A number of provisions in Subtitle A would be challenging to reconcile and implement with the agency's existing land management plans. For example, Section 111 includes a level of detail on management activities such as details on shaded fuel breaks, trail management, and special area designations, that would be better resolved through our planning process. Section 113 would establish the Northern California Public Lands Remediation Partnership for the purpose of providing for the remediation of the specified National Forest System lands and Bureau of Land Management lands in northern California affected by illegal marijuana cultivation or other illegal activities. Section 113 could be viewed as authorizing the Partnership, in place of the agencies, to carry out remediation on federal lands, rather than functioning strictly as a collaborative entity.

Changing how the agency revises the land management plans for Shasta-Trinity, Six Rivers, Klamath, and Mendocino National Forests would also create challenges. For example, Section 116 would require the agency to include comprehensive fire management plans for the wilderness areas and wilderness additions established in Subtitle C, when revising the land management plans for the Shasta-Trinity, Six Rivers, Klamath, and Mendocino National Forests. The Forest Service does not use the land management plan revision process to conduct fire management planning. To avoid adding unnecessary complexity while still meeting the overall goals of the section, the agency recommends amending Section 116(a) to maintain the current practice of conducting comprehensive fire management planning separately from the land management plan revision process.

Subtitle B

USDA supports creating trail systems that enhance connections to communities and welcomes working with the subcommittee, sponsor, local governments, and stakeholders to provide new recreation opportunities. However, the agency already possesses the authority to designate trails described in these provisions. The agency also possesses the partnership authorities outlined in Subtitle B.

Subtitle C

This Subtitle would establish new wilderness areas, as well as potential wilderness areas, expand existing wilderness areas and designate certain rivers in Northwest California as wild and scenic rivers. The agency has some technical concerns and clarifications that we would like to work with the subcommittee and the sponsor of this bill to address. My testimony pertains only to the designations proposed on NFS lands.

Of the 37 rivers proposed for wild and scenic river designation in the bill, 17 are in areas managed by the Forest Service. Of these, portions of five of these rivers (the North Fork Trinity

River, South Fork Trinity River, Hayfork Creek, Canyon Creek, and Middle Eel River) were previously supported for designation through the agency's land management planning process. A portion of one additional river (Red Mountain Creek) was previously found eligible but a suitability study has not been completed.

Subtitle C includes additions to eight existing wildernesses, designates six new wilderness areas and six potential wilderness areas on NFS lands. Several proposed areas for "Potential Wilderness" designations have a variety of non-conforming uses or conditions affecting wilderness character, including previously harvested areas as well as roads. While these additions and designations were not recommended for designation through the agency's land management planning process, USDA is supportive of these designations. We would like to work with the sponsors of this bill to address the concerns outlined above.

The bill includes a provision that would allow for continuation of a competitive equestrian event after the Chinquapin Wilderness is established in substantially the same manner and degree in which it has been operated in the past. This type of event is not consistent with current wilderness policy which prohibits competitive events, and USDA is concerned that this will set a precedent for future events in other wilderness areas. We would like to work with the bill sponsors to remove this special provision and provide for alternate routes for this event that would not intrude into wilderness.

Title II – Central Coast Heritage Protection

We recognize and appreciate the ongoing multi-year efforts of the sponsor and subcommittee toward improving the manageability of the multiple areas identified in this legislation. The bill designates certain NFS lands on the Los Padres National Forest in California as wilderness, creates additions to existing wildernesses, and designates potential wilderness areas, Scenic Areas, and a National Scenic Trail. The legislation directs the Forest Service to study the feasibility of connecting the northern and southern portions of the Los Padres National Forest using a trail corridor, the feasibility of opening a new trail to an existing off-highway vehicle trail system, and the possibility of improving non-motorized recreation trail opportunities on certain lands. Finally, the bill includes a provision to ensure Tribes have access to wilderness, scenic areas, and potential wilderness areas for traditional cultural and religious purposes.

Specifically, the bill includes additions to eight designated wilderness areas and one new wilderness designation for a total of 182,940 acres of NFS lands; provisions for two potential wilderness areas that would convert to two additions to designated wilderness areas within 20 years for a total of 41,937 acres. Three of the proposed wilderness additions in the bill were recommended for designation through the agency's land management planning process: Chumash, Dick Smith and Matilija.

The USDA has concerns with the fragmentation and ability to manage the Fox Mountain potential Wilderness Area, which would become an addition to the San Rafael Wilderness Area. The cherry stems and four excluded mountain bike trail corridors within the wilderness area

would have a high potential for mountain bike trespass into the wilderness area. To preserve wilderness character, we would like to work with the bill sponsor to not exclude these trails and make them non-mechanized.

The bill also includes additions to three existing wild and scenic rivers and designation of three new wild and scenic rivers, adding a total of 159 miles to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Finally, the bill contains provisions creating the Condor Ridge and Black Mountain Scenic Areas comprising 34,882 acres and creates the Condor National Scenic Trail.

USDA would like to work with the subcommittee on minor technical corrections required to ensure that the acres listed in the legislation match the acres shown on the maps referenced in the bill. Also, USDA would like to ensure a consistent and deliberate approach to mapping the areas proposed for wilderness to maximize effective management of the wilderness areas, including forest health and resiliency.

This title requires maps and legal descriptions for the boundaries of the potential wilderness areas, and updated maps and legal descriptions when the trail(s) have been reconstructed, realigned or rerouted. USDA would like to work with the subcommittee to ensure that correct and accurate maps and legal descriptions underpin this legislation.

The Department would also like to clarify the intent of the bill sponsor as to whether motorized equipment and mechanical transport will be allowed on the Condor National Scenic Trail in the non-wilderness segments, including use of mechanical/motorized tools to maintain the trail such as chainsaws. USDA would like to work with the bill sponsors to consider an alternative route to the proposed Condor Trail to avoid potential impacts to the Research Natural Area.

Section 211 would require the Secretary to ensure that Tribes have access to wilderness areas for traditional, cultural, and religious purposes. In carrying out this provision, the Secretary would be authorized, upon request of an American Indian Tribe, to temporarily close public access to portions of areas designated by the bill to protect the privacy of Tribal traditional cultural and religious activities in the area. USDA understands that implementation of this provision is at the discretion of the Secretary to determine whether a closure request is appropriate, and that access would be provided to the extent practicable to maintain the wilderness character and access for recreation.

Title III – San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection

Title III would expand the boundaries of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument to include an additional 109,143 acres of NFS lands, as well as designate approximately 29,042 acres in four areas as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System on the Angeles National Forest, and 45.5 miles of four rivers as components of the National Wild and Scenic River System. We defer to the Department of the Interior for a position on Section 313, which would establish the San Gabriel National Recreation Area.

USDA has not analyzed a proposed expansion of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. All four rivers proposed for wild and scenic river designation in the bill are in areas managed by the Forest Service. While three of these rivers (the East Fork, North Fork, and West Fork of the San Gabriel River) were previously found to be eligible, a suitability study has not been completed. One of the four rivers (Little Rock Creek) is not currently identified by the Forest Service as eligible or suitable for designation.

The bill also includes two wilderness additions and designation of two new wilderness areas on National Forest System lands. One of the proposed wilderness additions (Sheep Mountain) in the bill was recommended for designation through the agency's land management planning process.

The bill includes a provision that would allow the Angeles Crest 100 competitive running event to take place in two wilderness areas (Pleasant View Ridge Wilderness Area and the proposed Sheep Mountain Wilderness Addition) in substantially the same manner and degree in which it has been operated in the past. This type of event is not consistent with the wilderness act nor implementing policy, which prohibits competitive events, and the Administration is concerned that this will set a precedent for future events in other wilderness areas. We would like to work with the bill sponsors to remove this special provision and provide for alternate routes for this event that would not intrude into wilderness.

S. 1493, Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act

S. 1493, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, is a multi-faceted bill affecting the Lolo National Forest (Lolo) in Montana. USDA strongly appreciates Senator Tester's commitment to Montana's natural resources and public lands. We recognize that the proposed bill is the product of a collaborative effort, and we appreciate that this legislation would provide benefits to Montana's communities and the Lolo National Forest. We look forward to working with the subcommittee and Senator Tester to develop modifications to the bill that could provide greater opportunities to foster healthy rural economies and accomplish the shared goals of increasing restoration and facilitating a diversity of recreation opportunities on our public landscapes.

The bill directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a landscape assessment of watershed conditions and restoration needs on the Seeley Lake Ranger District within three years of enactment. It further directs the Secretary, in collaboration with interested parties, to develop a 10-year schedule of restoration projects as soon as practicable following the assessment. Restoration projects developed pursuant to the Act may be implemented using the authorities found in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003.

Additionally, the bill establishes a 2,013-acre Otatsy Recreation Management Area in which recreational motorized and mechanized uses and temporary roads are generally prohibited, and snowmobiles would be allowed during the winter as determined by the Secretary. S.1493 also establishes a 3,835-acre Spread Mountain Recreation Area in which motorized use is generally

prohibited, but mechanized use is allowed. It requires the Secretary to analyze, within three years of receipt, a collaboratively developed proposal to improve motorized and non-motorized recreational trail opportunities within the District, if such a proposal is submitted within five years of enactment. Finally, the bill designates an additional 79,060 acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

It is important to note that the Lolo is preparing to begin revising its land management plan, which will include extensive public engagement. Plan revision includes a forest-wide assessment to inform the development of desired conditions and objectives for the restoration and maintenance of ecological conditions across the plan area. It will also identify priority watersheds for restoration using the National Watershed Condition Framework. As that effort could overlap with and inform the requirements in Title 1, we would like to work with the bill sponsor to coordinate the desired outcomes of this legislation with our plan revision process.

Title II Section 203 would require the Forest Service to prepare a NEPA analysis for any collaboratively developed proposal to improve motorized and non-motorized recreational trail opportunities within the Ranger District within three years of receipt of the proposal. Such legislatively directed site-specific planning requirements with short timelines could result in resource and funding tradeoffs for the agency's planning staff during the forest plan revision process. Again, we would like to work with the bill sponsor to address these concerns.

USDA also has concerns about implementing section 202, which establishes the Spread Mountain Recreation Area for the purpose of specifically enhancing mechanized opportunities. The Lolo's current land and resource management plan identifies this area as recommended wilderness. This area contains at-risk fish and wildlife species habitat and is characterized by steep topography and sensitive soils. Trail 166 is the main access into this area. This trail is not maintained, not passable by riders on horseback, and becomes difficult to locate after the first mile. We appreciate the interest in expanding opportunities for mountain biking on the Lolo, but we are concerned that the site designated for the Spread Mountain Recreation Area is not ideal for this use, and that this designation could create conflicts with wildlife and other recreation uses.

Two of the three wilderness designations in Title III are consistent with the recommendations made in the existing Lolo National Forest land and resource management plan. The third designation (West Fork Clearwater) was not recommended in the management plan to be wilderness; it was allocated to be managed to optimize recovery of the Grizzly Bear. Management for this purpose does not conflict with wilderness values or designation. USDA supports these designations.

We recognize and appreciate that the bill is the product of a collaborative effort. The concepts embodied in this legislation—such as recognizing collaboratively developed landscape scale restoration and recreation proposals—are fundamentally sound. We share Senator Tester's respect for and commitment to collaboration, and the Forest Service is working with and will

continue to work with Senator Tester on modifications to ensure that implementation of the bill will not adversely affect other Lolo priorities or priority work on other units in the Forest Service's Northern Region.

S. 1538 –Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act

S. 1528, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act, would amend the Smith River National Recreation Area Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to include certain additions to the Smith River National Recreation Area and to designate specified Wild and Scenic Rivers in the State of Oregon. Enactment of this bill would result in the Smith River National Recreation Area being expanded from northern California to encompass the North Fork of the Smith River Watershed in southwestern Oregon and to be managed for its world class recreational access, special scenic value, natural diversity, cultural and historical attributes, wilderness, wildlife, and fisheries. Additionally, approximately 75 miles within the watersheds of the North Fork and mainstem of the Smith River would be added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Section 2: Additions to the Smith River National Recreation Area

Section 2(d) of this bill would require a study of the affected area within five years of enactment with modifications to land management plans being implemented upon completion of the study. No impacts to vegetation or wildfire management are noted in the bill and nothing in the bill affects the application of the Northwest Forest Plan or Roadless Rule in the State of Oregon. Section 2(h) requires the Secretary of Agriculture to enter a Memorandum of Understanding with American Indian Tribes to preserve and protect Tribal rights and to ensure access. Further, it is required that interpretive materials regarding the Tribes be developed and made publicly available.

Land acquisition authority is expanded and clarified with a directive to the Secretary of Agriculture to acquire a 555-acre area of state-owned land known as the Cedar Creek Parcel, pending availability of funding and approval by the State Land Board of Oregon. This would allow for contiguous management by the Forest Service of most lands within the proposed boundary.

USDA supports expanding recreational access in a manner that preserves the ecological, cultural, and historical integrity of a landscape and that supports the social and economic needs of adjacent communities.

Section 3: Wild and Scenic River Designations

Section 3 of this bill amends two existing wild and scenic river designations to add 25 segments totaling roughly 75 miles within the watersheds of the North Fork and mainstem of the Smith River. USDA supports wild and scenic river designations and recognizes the importance of protecting and enhancing identified river values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and

future generations. While we support the goals of this bill, we would like to work with the subcommittee and bill sponsors to clarify some timing and technical concerns associated with the proposed designations.

USDA would like to ensure that any new segments are properly integrated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with enough time to develop comprehensive river management plans (CRMPs) and to establish detailed boundaries in cooperation with Tribes, State and local governments, and interested stakeholders. The timeframes identified under Sections 3(b) and 3(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act for completing detailed boundaries and CRMPs can be challenging to meet. Therefore, we would like to work with the subcommittee and bill sponsors to identify ways to support timely completion of CRMP and boundary requirements.

The Forest Service embraces its mission to steward and safeguard its Iconic National Recreation Areas and free flowing Wild and Scenic Rivers with their outstandingly remarkable values and to provide recreational access, clean drinking water, and economic vitality to the American people. We are committed to collaborating openly with Congress, Tribes, and all members of the interested public to identify and propose appropriate parcels of land and segments of river within the National Forest System for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Recreation Areas and to manage those parcels responsibly. We look forward to working with the subcommittee and sponsors of this bill to address the concerns outlined above.

S. 1583, Lake Tahoe Restoration Reauthorization Act

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, P.L. No.106-506 authorized \$415,000,000 in appropriations for a period of seven fiscal years, beginning the first fiscal year after the date of enactment of the Water Resource Development Act of 2016. Of that amount, \$150,000,000 was authorized to carry out fire risk reduction and forest management priority projects, with at least \$100,000,000 to be used for programs identified as part of the Lake Tahoe Basin Multi-Jurisdictional Fuel Reduction and Wildfire Prevention Strategy 10-Year Plan. Further, \$113,000,000 was authorized to support stormwater management, erosion control, and total watershed restoration priority projects. With much consultation and coordination, the Forest Service has funded approximately \$33 million in environmental improvement projects within those two programs during this time.

A significant amount of the appropriated funds authorized under the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act have been delivered through our cooperators as they increase our ability to complete forest, watershed, erosion control and invasive plant projects on both NFS and private lands. In addition, the agency has greatly accelerated the pace and scale of forest restoration activities through the use of the categorical exclusion from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in the Act. With the authority to conduct mechanical thinning on up to 3,000 acres of NFS lands around Lake Tahoe, the Forest Service has reduced the timeframe for and cost of planning efforts, resulting in faster implementation of projects. By

coordinating with our cooperators, we have minimized conflicts in project planning and implementation.

S. 1583 reauthorizes the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act through September 30, 2034. USDA supports the reauthorization as it removes the four-year requirements to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with states, local governments, and other public and private entities to provide for fuel reduction, erosion control, reforestation, and other management activities on federal and non-federal lands under the programs outlined in the Act. We would like to work with the bill sponsor to allow for the use of Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act of 1998 funds to increase fuel reduction activities on the environmentally sensitive urban lots acquired under the Santini-Burton Act.

S. 1589, Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act

S. 1589 – Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act, would expand an existing wilderness boundary, establish two national recreation areas, and would permanently withdraw two areas of federal land from the mining laws of the United States to protect them from new mining claims, other mineral leasing, and geothermal leasing. USDA views regarding S. 1589 only pertain to provisions affecting the Forest Service and NFS lands.

Section 3: Establishment of Rogue Canyon and Molalla National Recreation Areas

Molalla National Recreation Area: As the language and the map referenced in Section 3(a)(2) of the bill indicate, the establishment of the recreation area would consist only of Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management lands with no adjacent National Forest System land. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior regarding the establishment of this National Recreation Area.

Rogue Canyon National Recreation Area: As the language and the map referenced in Section 3(a)(1) of the bill indicate, the expansion of this area would consist only of Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management lands. USDA defers to the Department of Interior regarding the establishment of this National Recreation Area. However, USDA would like to work with the subcommittee to develop the detailed "inset map" in the legislation to ensure that the boundaries between the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service parcels are clear and unambiguous.

Wildfire Risk Assessment: Section 3(c)(3) requires a wildfire risk assessment be conducted for the Molalla National Recreation Area and Rogue Canyon National Recreation Area designated on BLM lands, the Wild Rogue Wilderness, and any Federal land adjacent to these recreation areas or wilderness areas within 280 day of enactment.

Wildfire Mitigation Plan: Section 3(c)(4) requires a wildfire mitigation plan be developed, based on the wildfire risk assessment in Section 3(c)(3), no later than 1 year after the wildfire risk assessments completion.

Section 4: Expansion of the Wild Rogue Wilderness Area

Section 4 of the bill expands the Wild Rogue Wilderness by an additional 59,512 acres of federal land and directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to administer the added lands under their jurisdiction. However, given the scale of the map of the added lands referenced in Section 4(a)(1), it is unclear if any acreage of National Forest System land is included in the proposed expansion.

Under P.L. 95-237, the Forest Service has administered a portion of the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness that is otherwise under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management. Under Section 4(b)(1)(A), the administration of this portion would shift back to Bureau of Land Management. Given the proposed additions of contiguous Bureau of Land Management land to the Wild Rogue Wilderness, USDA supports having the Bureau of Land Management administer land under its jurisdiction. However, we would like to work with the subcommittee and Bureau of Land Management to develop a plan for the transfer of land administration and on the detailed "inset map" in the legislation to ensure that the boundaries between Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service parcels are clear and unambiguous to mitigate management challenges associated with non-contiguous lands. Specifically, several non-contiguous portions of the Wild Rogue Wilderness under the management of the Forest Service lie adjacent to the Bureau of Land Management portion of the wilderness but outside the proposed wilderness expansion and outside the proposed National Recreation Area. These parcels are likely to pose management challenges (T31S, R10W, sect. 10, 11, 14, 15 and T32S, R10W, Sect. 19, 20, 21, & 22).

Section 5: Withdrawal

The maps referenced in Section 5(a)(2) of the bill depict NFS and Bureau of Land Management lands that would be subject to the mineral withdrawal in Section 5(b). The two proposed withdrawal areas – known as Rough and Ready, Baldface and Hunter Creek Pistol River Headwaters – total 95,806 acres that are located on National Forest System lands on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. The remaining 5,216 acres are located on public land managed by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. USDA supports the proposed withdrawal on National Forest System lands.

The Forest Service embraces its mission to steward and safeguard wilderness areas. The administration is committed to balancing management of America's public lands and waters to create jobs, confront the ongoing climate crisis, and align the management of our public lands and waters with our nation's climate, conservation, and clean energy goals. We look forward to working with the subcommittee and sponsors of this bill to address the concerns outlined above.

S. 1631, Arizona Experiment Station Land Conveyance Act of 2021

S. 1631, the Arizona Experiment Station Land Conveyance Act of 2021, directs the Forest Service to convey 13.3 acres of NFS lands as well as an easement on Forest Service Road 9201D to the Arizona Board of Regents. The Forest Service is aware that this request stems from ongoing complexities in managing a University of Arizona Experiment Station (Station) through a term grazing permit. The Station is a benefit to everyone, especially the grazing industry, and USDA is committed to helping the station thrive. We would like to work with the Station and bill sponsor to explore alternatives for meeting the intent of this Act.

A primary objective of the Forest Service land adjustment program is to achieve a land ownership pattern that provides for the protection and best management of NFS resources. Conveyance of this tract would create an isolated parcel of private land, or inholding, within the Coconino National Forest, which is not consistent with the Forest Service policy and direction to consolidate NFS lands within a forest unit. Should the Arizona Board of Regents choose to sell the property in the future, the Forest Service would be obligated to try to purchase it again to fulfill the intent of the land management program and to minimize encroachment on NFS lands.

We look forward to working with the Station and bill sponsor to explore ways to support this important research asset while providing for the best management of the national forest.

That concludes my testimony, Madam Chair. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other members have for me.