

**Statement of  
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**Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining  
H.R. 2075, Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act  
August 22, 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 2075, 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. We appreciate the work of the sponsor to address concerns raised in our previous testimony.

The Department supports H.R. 2075, which we believe is consistent with the Secretary's priority of being a good neighbor and better serving local communities. We also strongly support the sponsor's goal of reducing hazardous fuels and preventing wildfires that may impact the communities adjacent to this WSA. The Department determined that a portion of the WSA may fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As such, we would like to work with the sponsor on an amendment to the bill that we believe will aid implementation. The Department looks forward to continuing to work with the sponsor and 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.

**H.R. 2075, the Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act**

H.R. 2075 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 of 1976 (FLPMA). The Department has recently determined that the some of the BLM-managed lands that would be impacted by H.R. 2075 may fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the Forest Service. In order to ensure that the legislation fully achieves its objective, the BLM would like to work with the sponsor on a technical change that would address this discrepancy.

The Department shares the sponsor’s goal of reducing fire threats that may impact the life and safety of people and private property near the WSA. We also recognize the significant work of stakeholders to reach a consensus on the future management of public lands in this area, particularly with respect to balancing the protection of natural resources within the WSA with actions to address wildland fire risk. The Department 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.

As a matter of policy, the Department strongly supports Congressional action to resolve issues of wilderness designation and release of WSAs on public lands across the West, and we welcome opportunities to further those efforts. Only Congress can determine whether to designate WSAs as wilderness or to release them for other multiple uses. As such, the Department also supports Congress settling the status of the remainder of the Deschutes Canyon-Steelhead Falls WSA, which would provide certainty to public land users this area. In addition, the Department would like to work with the sponsor to include standard WSA release language in the bill. This would enable the BLM to manage the lands to be released consistent with local land use plans. It is the local planning process through which the BLM makes important decisions on management of these lands, including, among other things, conventional and renewable energy production, grazing, mining, off-highway vehicle use, hunting, and the consideration of natural values.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of the Interior appreciates the work of the sponsor, the Subcommittee, and stakeholders on public land management issues in and around the Deschutes Canyon-Steelhead Falls WSA. The Department supports H.R. 2075, which we believe is consistent with the Secretary’s priority of being a good neighbor and better serving local communities. We look forward to continuing to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to address some technical issues as this bill moves through the legislative process.