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Testimony of Rick Johnson, Executive Director, Idaho Conservation League

Before the US Senate Subcommittee on Forests, Public Lands, and Mining

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Regarding S. 583

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act

May 21, 2015 – Washington, DC

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Rick Johnson and I am the executive director of the Idaho Conservation League. I ask that these comments be included in the hearing record.

The Idaho Conservation League was founded in 1973; we are Idaho's oldest and largest state based conservation organization. Our mission is to protect Idaho's clean air and water, wilderness, and the outdoor values that provide Idaho its extraordinary quality of life.

The Idaho Conservation League has been a strong supporter of wilderness legislation for the Boulder-White Clouds since our founding. We have worked with members of the Idaho congressional delegation, particularly, Rep. Mike Simpson, to advance wilderness designation for more than a decade. I personally have worked to protect this area for 30 years.

We have been here before. In June 2010, when I appeared at this table, Sen. Risch--along with the entire Idaho delegation--had introduced an earlier version of this bill. During the hearing Senator Risch expressed reservations. He told us the bill needed more compromise.

There has now been more compromise. The breadth of engagement in this bill is unprecedented in Idaho history.

Once again, respectful of compromise, respectful of the legislative process, I am here to speak in support of this bill. The Idaho Conservation League has worked with Rep. Mike Simpson for well over a decade on this legislation. We've worked with Sen. Risch and Sen. Crapo for a long time, too.

We all get points for persistence.

But it's not about us.

This is about the Boulder-White Clouds. These mountain ranges, containing the headwaters of four rivers with some of the highest elevation salmon habitat on Earth, are a very special place. This is a landscape of summer and winter range for big game. It is an unparalleled recreation resource for many different pursuits, all protected in this compromise bill. The wild heart of the Boulder-White Clouds deserves the highest protection in the land, and wilderness designation provides that.

It's time to get the job done.

There has never been more energy directed to the Boulder-White Clouds as there is today. One way or another, prospects have never been better. Passing this bill would get the job done. A bill written by an Idaho House and Senate member is the best path forward for a number of reasons.

The depth of support is remarkable: I asked the delegation for a sense of the groups on board. The following are either supportive, or not opposed to the current version going forward. This is far from the opposition we saw in this room 5 years ago.

- Ranchers on the East Fork of the Salmon are supportive and the Idaho Cattle Association and the Idaho Farm Bureau will not stand in the way. Idaho Water Users are supportive of the water protections.
- The Sawtooth Society is supportive as is the Custer County Commission.
- The Idaho Recreation Council representing motorized trailbikes and snowmobiles are not opposed and the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association is supportive.

And many conservationists support this bill including the Idaho Conservation League, The Wilderness Society and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

And with respect to my friend and colleague beside me, this bill is also supported by a many mountain bikers, if not by the formal organizations. The biking groups would like full bike access. I sympathize and personally know compromise is hard. It's been hard for our interests, too. If the bill passes, we will, regrettably, have 57,000 fewer acres protected as wilderness than in the previous version of this bill. There are significant parts of the Boulder-White Clouds not in this bill we always assumed would be. We recognize compromise is hard.

I will say bikes have more access to trails in this bill than in any other Boulder-White Clouds legislation to date.

The failure to compromise is why we've failed before. It is extraordinary commitment to compromise that brings us to this committee again.

This bill is not perfect. Sen. Risch and Rep. Simpson have long demonstrated that, in order to govern, you cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

There has never been so great a consensus around legislation for the Boulder-White Clouds. There are many reasons for this, but working together, we may finally have the wind at our back.

This hearing is an important step and I applaud Sen. Risch and the committee for holding this hearing. But there are many more steps ahead. The road is long and the time is very short.

One way or another, it's time to permanently protect this landscape. Passage of this bill would do that.

The Place

Central Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds are the largest roadless landscape in the lower 48 states eligible for wilderness protection. The area contains significant ecological and wilderness values and is home to a rich variety of wildlife, include threatened and endangered species. Salmon travel nearly 1,100 miles from the ocean, over dams, to return home to the highest elevation spawning habitat in United States. Rare plants are also located here that grow nowhere else on earth. The Boulder-White Clouds are a treasured landscape for many recreationists because of their remote wild character and immense opportunities for solitude. The area has a rich history from the earliest native American inhabitants dating back thousands of years to the more modern day relics of Idaho's mining boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

All the resources described here are within or in the immediate vicinity of lands that would be designated wilderness by this bill.

Roadless and Wilderness Study Areas

The Boulder-White Clouds are one of the most nationally significant roadless landscapes in the United States from both an ecological and sociological perspective. At nearly 590,000 acres, the combined complex of Forest Service roadless areas and Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas constitute the largest unprotected landscape in the United States outside Alaska.

The complex consists of two U.S. Forest Service Inventoried Roadless areas (IRAs) and four Bureau of Land Management Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), described in greater detail below. The wild nature of this remote landscape offers unparalleled opportunities for wilderness recreation, scenic vistas and opportunities for solitude.

The Boulder-White Clouds Roadless Area (462,822 acres) is the largest U.S. Forest Service IRA in the state of Idaho and one of the largest in the lower 48 states. It is administered by the Sawtooth and Salmon-Challis National forests and is one of only two congressionally designated wilderness study areas in Idaho. The legislation does not protect this area in its entirety and, regrettably, also does not protect all of the area recommended as wilderness by the US Forest Service.

The Railroad Ridge IRA (50,818 acres) includes a unique, high-elevation ridgeline that was shaped by alpine glaciers, as well as steep river breaks above the main Salmon River. The relatively flat and broad ridgeline harbors a unique assemblage of rare and endemic plants. The Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan proposes the establishment of botanical special interest area or research natural area to protect these features. This area, regrettably, is not included in the legislation.

Three Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas (WSAs) are contiguous to the east side of the Boulder-White Clouds IRA; the Boulder Creek WSA (1,930 acres); Jerry Peak West WSA (13,530 acres) and Jerry Peak WSA (14,150 acres). A fourth WSA—the Corral-Horse Basin WSA

(46,500)—is located northeast of the Jerry Peak WSA. Much of the acreage covered by the Bureau of Land Management wilderness study areas will be released to multiple use under this legislation.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The headwaters of four major river systems originate in the Boulder–White Clouds, including the Big Wood River, North Fork Big Lost River, East Fork Salmon River, and legendary Salmon River. They are clean, free-flowing waters that provide habitat for anadromous and resident fish as well as opportunities for angling, boating, scenic viewpoints, and municipal drinking water. Many of these rivers and their tributaries are considered eligible for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

A comprehensive study just released by the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station indicates that within the century, the high alpine waterways found in the Boulder-White Clouds will be one of just a few suitable habitats remaining in the west for threatened bull trout and other cold-water dependent species.

Fish and Wildlife

The Boulder-White Clouds is some of the most important alpine fish and wildlife habitat in Idaho. Because of the unique topography, it provides an exceptional assemblage of connected summer and winter ranges for rare and threatened animal species such as wolverine, lynx, fisher, pine martin, bighorn sheep and mountain lion. Wolverine and lynx in particular are adapted to deep snowpack, characteristic of the high mountains in the Boulder-White Clouds. The Canada lynx is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Wolverine is a candidate for listing.

The Boulder-White Clouds are also home to the highest altitude Chinook salmon and Steelhead habitat in the United States. While downstream dams have severely depleted wild stocks of salmon and Steelhead, the critical habitats found in the Boulder-White Clouds are crucial in aiding in the recovery of these species.

Because of the diversity of wildlife, including the numerable presence of deer and elk, and the backcountry wild character, the Boulder-White Clouds are a treasured destination for hunters, fisherman, and wildlife watchers.

Railroad Ridge

In the north-central part of the Boulder-White Clouds is a high alpine ridgeline known as Railroad Ridge. Unlike the jagged peaks and ridgelines that typify much of the Boulder–White Clouds, Railroad Ridge is a broad, relatively flat ridge. Shaped by glacial forces during the ice ages, Railroad Ridge hosts an array of endemic alpine plant species.

One plant species—White Cloud milkvetch—is found nowhere else on earth than Railroad Ridge. The only known population of northern sagewort in Idaho also occurs here. Slender moonwort, another rare plant found on the ridge, is a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Small stands of whitebark pine exist in sheltered areas just below the main ridgeline. Many of the trees are at least 1,100 years old and thought to be the oldest known whitebark pine on the planet. Right now, these stands are free of blister rust, which has infected many whitebark pine forests throughout the west.

Geothermal Features

Hot springs are located along many streams and rivers in the Boulder–White Clouds. Natural springs and tubs are found at Slate Creek, Bowery, and West Pass creek. These natural springs have a history dating back to the area’s earliest inhabitants. Today, both human visitors as well as a rich variety of wildlife visit these springs.

Early Inhabitation

Historic hunting and fishing sites including blinds and shelters from early Native American inhabitants are found across the Boulder-White Clouds landscape. Many of these sites remain undisturbed even today and have significant historical and cultural value. With the area lacking formal protection, these sites remain at risk from disturbance and damage into the future.

Historic Mining Settlements

Beginning in the 1860’s, early settlers from the mining booms in the west began to develop both mines and homesites within in the Boulder-White Clouds. Today, many of these mining relics still remain intact across the area and boast interesting and unique stories that accompany the abandoned structures.

The Conservation History

Before the late 1960s few people knew anything about the Boulder-White Clouds of Central Idaho. That change began in 1968. The American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) proposed an open-pit molybdenum mine at the base of Castle Peak- an aptly named monolith that rises well above the surrounding peaks in the center of the White Cloud Mountains. The mining industry had never faced any considerable opposition in Idaho, a fact that led to Idaho’s nickname, “The Gem State.”

The controversy around the proposed mine substantially altered Idaho’s history and the fate of the Boulder-White Clouds. When the state endorsed the proposed mine, the Director of the Idaho Department of Parks board, Ernest Day, resigned his post. Day’s aerial photos of Castle Peak are now an iconic image known to many Idahoans. Even today, they still serve to illustrate to the public where what would have been lost if the proposed open pit mine would have been located.

Coincidentally a young Cecil D. Andrus was running for governor. Andrus took the position that this very special part of Central Idaho was too important to sacrifice to an open pit mine. In 1970, Andrus won the election largely because of the stance he took to protect the Boulder-White Clouds.

Two years later, Senator Frank Church successfully moved legislation through Congress to designate the Sawtooth National Recreation Area by an act known as Public Law 92-400. This act was a step in the right direction for the Boulder-White Clouds, withdrawing Castle Peak from mining and designating the neighboring Sawtooth Mountains as Wilderness. But in the end, the legislation punted on the issue of designating the Boulder-White Cloud Mountains, leaving the decision to a future Congress by directing the Forest Service to study the area for Wilderness designation or National Park status. Below is the excerpts from Public Law 92-400 referencing the Boulder-White Clouds:

Section 5 of Public Law 92-400: *“The Secretary shall, as soon as practicable after the enactment of this Act, review the undeveloped and unimproved portion or portions of the recreation area as to suitability or non-suitability for preservation as a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System...”*

Sec 14 (a) of Public Law 92-400: *“The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with appropriate Federal, State, and Local agencies, shall make a comprehensive analysis of the natural, economic, and cultural values of the recreation area and the adjacent Pioneer Mountains for the purpose of evaluating the potentiality of establishing therein a national park or other unit of the national park system. He shall submit a report of the results of the analysis along with his recommendation to Congress by December 31, 1974.”*

Sec 14 (2) of Public Law 92-400: *“The establishment of a national park in the mountain peaks and upland areas together with such portions of the national recreation area as may be necessary and appropriate for the proper administration and public use of the and access to such park lands, leaving the valleys and low-lying lands available for multiple-use purposes...”*

Legislative Wilderness efforts

Over the course of the last four decades, many attempts at Wilderness legislation for the Boulder-White Clouds have occurred.

In 1984, Sen. James McClure (R-ID) introduced wilderness legislation that would have protected a portion of the Boulder–White Clouds. Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, various attempts to move legislation failed. Key participants at various times included Sen. McClure, Gov. Cecil D. Andrus (D), Rep. Richard Stallings (D-ID), and Rep. Mike Crapo (R-ID).

In 2004, Congressman Mike Simpson introduced his first Boulder–White Clouds wilderness bill, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act. Simpson’s legislation was based on addressing key interests of those who had played a role in stopping past initiatives to protect the Boulder-White Clouds: ranchers, counties, motorized users, and wilderness advocates. With each group, he proposed making sure they got something more than they could get any other way, on their own. Simpson and his staff tirelessly met with agency officials, proponents and opponents to craft a middle ground for wilderness protection for the Boulder-White Clouds.

Conservation groups such as the Idaho Conservation League, The Wilderness Society, and Campaign for America’s Wilderness, worked with Congressman Simpson to improve his wilderness bill, adding wilderness acreage and removing or modifying some objectionable provisions. Motorcycle and snowmobile groups continued to oppose any additional wilderness in Idaho.

In 2006, the bill passed the U.S. House. At the close of Congress, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act was included in the very-end-of-session tax extenders bill. In the last hours of the lame duck session, the Speaker substituted another measure. This was the closest that the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act ever came to passage.

In 2010, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act, after being unable to move in the House, was renegotiated with Senate Democratic committee staff and reintroduced by the entire Idaho congressional delegation: Rep. Mike Simpson, Rep. Walt Minnick (D-ID), Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Sen. Jim Risch (R-ID). At a Senate Committee hearing, after supporting Simpson's bill as governor and then as a bill sponsor, Sen. Risch withdrew his support and stopped committee action on the bill. His action, presumably, was the result of pressure from the motorized use community. Idaho Governor Butch Otter raised objections with the legislation before the hearing, providing yet another unexpected setback.

In 2011, on the first day of the 112th Congress, Simpson reintroduced CIEDRA but no hearing was ever scheduled.

In March of 2015, Rep. Mike Simpson along with Sen. Jim Risch introduced a scaled-back version of previous legislative efforts, re-naming the new bill the Sawtooth National Recreation Area Plus or SNRA+. This is the legislation before us today.

A cutback of approximately 60,000 acres of wilderness was included in this version to ensure that no motorized routes would be closed. This key aspect of the reworked legislation helped bring Sen. Risch back on board. To date, the House has not scheduled a hearing.

This long history has been the subject of considerable media (local, regional and national print and television) and academic attention (masters theses and doctoral dissertations). The long and involved evolution of collaborative conservation spurred on by the Boulder-White Clouds has, thus far, failed to protect this area, but it has reshaped conservation in Idaho. Another collaborative endeavor, the Owyhee Initiative, led to passage of the first wilderness bill for Idaho in 29 years, in the Omnibus bill signed by President Barack Obama in 2009.

Idaho Conservation League's Engagement and Support of The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act

No other conservation organization in the state of Idaho has worked as closely or as long to get the Boulder-White Clouds protected as the Idaho Conservation League. For decades—since our founding 42 years ago—the Idaho Conservation League has supported wilderness protection for this area. We have worked closely with Rep. Mike Simpson for 12 years to advance his compromise bills in Congress. Over many years, his efforts have been blocked by the left and later by the right, and, remarkably, he keeps leaning into it, looking for the rarest of paths in Congress: the center.

This will mark the third time I've testified in front of Congress for this bill; once in 2005, once in 2010, and now I am here before Congress again. We've come close in the past, but close is not enough to protect this nationally unique and incredibly special area. While the Idaho Conservation League stands in support of this bill we have earned a measure of skepticism that Congress can really get this job done. We hope to be proven wrong.

This bill is not perfect; the Idaho Conservation League would have written it very differently. We've seen the wilderness area get smaller each time compromises were made and this is

disappointing. We are concerned that the lands surrounding one of primary rivers leading up into the Boulder-White Clouds, the East Fork of the Salmon River, have been cut from this proposal. We are disheartened that much of the land that the Bureau of Land Management has for many years managed as wilderness study areas will be released.

We have time and time again, weighed in on the failure of many U.S. Forest Service managers to not manage agency recommended wilderness as such. Despite both recommendations from agencies and Congress, many of these managers have chosen to continue to let motorized use grow and become entrenched in the agency's recommended wilderness, which ultimately resulted in the reduction of thousands of acres of land being removed in this bill from wilderness designation.

The Idaho Conservation League is a supporter and strong believer that the Boulder-White Clouds can wait no longer for the protections they deserve. Too much time has passed already. We are looking at all means to secure protection. We believe the most effective way to manage this critical area is as a whole, across the landscape, rather than in pieces.

But we do not fault the delegation for the compromises made. Instead we applaud the dedicated effort to protect this world-class place and we commend the leadership demonstrated to get this done.

This bill before Congress today is the culmination of fourteen years of work by Rep. Mike Simpson to reach a common-sense collaborative solution. Rep. Simpson has spent years working to build bridges, going out and meeting with communities, with landowners, and interest groups. He has worked long and hard to incorporate the needs and interests of the people who live, work, and play in the affected landscape. The components of this bill are based on good faith negotiations concluded with handshakes, all values and actions we see too little of today.

Most importantly, the bill before Congress today gives much of the Boulder-White Clouds area the wilderness protection it deserves and that is a great thing. If this legislation is enacted, which we believe it should be, it would bring closure to the 40+ year Boulder-White Clouds conservation effort in Idaho and honor not only the land itself but also the prominent Idaho leaders from both political parties that have dedicated themselves to the protection of this incredible area. Over the past 40 years, champions of the Boulder-White Clouds have included former Governor of Idaho and Former Secretary of the Department of Interior Cecil D. Andrus (D), Former Idaho U.S. Senator and past Chairman of this committee, James McClure (R), Former U.S. Senator and conservation advocate Frank Church (D), and long-time wilderness advocate and local grass-roots leader Bethine Church (D).

Specifics on S. 583; The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act

Wilderness Designation

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act (S.583) would designate 275,665 acres as wilderness. This designation would protect critical alpine areas, including nearly 150 peaks over 10,000 feet in elevation. It would also provide protections for much of the areas' spawning beds for salmon, habitat for wildlife, and backcountry recreational experiences for generations of Americans to come.

A total of 153,883 acres of recommended wilderness and wilderness study areas (WSA) would be released to multiple use management. Under previous legislation (Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act or CIEDRA), a total of 332,928 acres would have been designated as wilderness with approximately 131,500 acres of recommended wilderness and wilderness study areas (WSA) being released to multiple use.

The Idaho Conservation League believes that many of these eligible yet not included areas exemplify extraordinary wilderness character and the exclusion of these areas is disheartening for us to see. Many of these areas that were not proposed for wilderness were the result of extraordinary measures taken to provide access for motorized recreation in recommended wilderness.

Grazing

It is a common misconception that the Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits grazing operations in the wilderness. As this Committee is fully aware, established grazing operations are permitted within designated wilderness areas. The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act (S.583) is consistent with the Wilderness Act by allowing existing grazing operations to continue within the wilderness boundary. Rep. Mike Simpson has worked very hard to ensure impacted landowners and grazing permittees are aware that grazing would continue under wilderness designation.

S.583 also provides a mechanism for willing ranchers to retire their grazing leases and permits and receive fair compensation for the termination of their grazing rights. When a rancher chooses to voluntarily retire their grazing rights, fair compensation will be paid by private funding sources already lined up. This important provision has no negative fiscal impact on the federal budget and ensures that the quality of rangelands, wildlife habitat, and streamside areas in the Boulder-White Clouds only improve over time. The Idaho Conservation League supports this mechanism and feels that this will be a critical element to preserving the long-term ecological integrity of the area while also protecting the heritage and life-style that ranching represents to the west.

Outfitting and Guiding

S. 583 allows for outfitting and guiding operations within the proposed wilderness areas when such ventures lead to and support the realization of the values of wilderness protection.

State Jurisdiction over Fish and Wildlife

S. 583 does not affect the State of Idaho's jurisdiction over the management of fish and game species within the wilderness areas. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game will continue to regulate hunting and fishing activities within and outside the wilderness areas designated by S. 583.

When the Idaho Department of Fish and Game believes that it is necessary to take active steps to manage or monitor populations of fish and game species within the wilderness areas designated by S. 583, the Department will have authority to do so as it always has.

The preservation of 275,665 acres as wilderness will also benefit hunters and anglers by protecting important habitat for deer, elk, pronghorn, mountain goat, bear, salmon, steelhead, trout and numerous other species. This designation will provide a lasting benefit for many fish and game

species by enhancing and protecting their habitat. The result is a legacy for generations of sportsmen to come.

Motorized Recreation

This group is an important constituency and was consulted by Rep. Mike Simpson in the crafting of this bill. While concessions given to the motorized community in previous bills resulted in a minimal closure to motorized trails, this constituent group remained opposed to Simpson's efforts.

To further address the motorized community, approximately 57,263 acres have been subtracted from the legislation. The result is no closures of motorized routes under this legislation. Additionally, the 153,883 acres of recommended wilderness and wilderness study areas (WSA) will be released to multiple uses and this poses the potential to open up more land to motorized use in the future.

Snowmobiles

Snowmobile use is a growing recreational activity in this area. Substantial concessions have been made over the years to facilitate continued winter snowmobile use in the Boulder-White Clouds. The following recommended wilderness areas have been excluded from wilderness designation to ensure continued access for snowmobiles. These areas include:

- Forth of July Basin
- Washington Basin
- Champion Lakes
- North Fork of the Big Lost River

Some wilderness acreage has been added back to the North Fork Big Wood drainage. The Idaho Conservation League supports this addition. While recommended for wilderness, previous versions of the bill excluded the drainage because of a local agreement reached between snowmobilers and backcountry skiers in 2001 that resolved recreational conflicts in the backcountry areas surrounding Sun Valley. It is our understanding that local snowmobile were consulted about this North Fork Big Wood Drainage and a new agreement was made that this area would be swapped out for a different area that had historically been included in the Wilderness bill, the North Fork of the Big Lost River region.

Motorized off-road vehicles

The wilderness boundaries created in S.583 exclude all motorized trails in the Boulder-White Clouds. Previous versions of this legislation had unprecedented provisions that created "cherry stems" within the wilderness corridor, where dirt bikers would have been able to ride with wilderness surrounding them on both sides of the trail. The areas where these cherry stems existed have been cut out of the wilderness proposal. The roads and trails within the Boulder-White Clouds that are excluded from the wilderness areas in order to maintain access include:

- Frog Lake Loop Trail 047 & 686
- Germania Trail 111
- Grand Prize Trail 112
- Washington Basin Road 197
- Washington Lake Trail 109 to Washington Lake

- Forth of July Road 209 to the Phyllis Lake turnoff
- Phyllis Lake Road
- Pole Creek Road 197
- Fisher Creek Road 132
- Williams Creek Trails 104 & 332
- North Fork of the Big Lost River Road 146
- Casino Lakes Trails 103, 232, 616, & 646
- Rough Creek Trails 617 & 647
- Railroad Ridge Area Roads 667, 669, & 670
- French Creek Trail 675
- Big Lake Creek Trail 678
- Germania Creek- Bowery Cutoff Trail 114
- Livingston Mill Road 667
- East Fork Road 120 to Bowery Guard Station
- West Pass Creek Road 063 to section 10
- Big Fall Creek Road 168
- Little Fall Creek Road 502
- Park Creek Road 140
- Herd Creek Road to Herd Lake
- Road Creek Road

This list of concessions for motorized recreation paints a pretty clear picture. Every motorized recreation opportunity that exists today (including where the use is occurring in recommended wilderness) will remain intact under the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act.

If this bill does not pass Congress, the fate of 589,750 acres of roadless land, recommended wilderness and wilderness study areas will remain undecided. Determinations on whether or not to allow motorized use in these areas will continue to be left to the discretion of the land managers charged with preserving the wilderness character. We strongly encourage Congress to not to wait any longer. The Boulder-White Clouds need protection now.

Mechanized vehicles

Wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964 is the gold standard for conservation in the United States. The Idaho Conservation League is among other things a wilderness advocacy group and we stand by the Wilderness Act. We strongly believe that the Boulder-White Clouds is one such place that is absolutely deserving of the gold standard protection. As this committee is fully aware, the Wilderness Act of 1964 precludes both motorized and mechanized travel.

S. 583 boundaries for wilderness designation include compromises to accommodate mechanized use in the Boulder-White Clouds on important and prized trails. This bill does, however, close some infrequently used trails in the Boulder-White Clouds to bikes. One of these trails, Castle Divide, runs through the heart of the proposed White Cloud Wilderness. The Idaho Conservation league does not support the loss of wilderness acreage nor “cherry stemming” through the heart of this wilderness area in order to make future accommodations under wilderness designation.

The Idaho Conservation League has worked closely with the mechanized recreation community on protection efforts for the Boulder-White Clouds. Together our groups believe that the preservation of the wilderness character and ecological values along with human-powered recreation is important to the long-term protection and management of this spectacular landscape.

Economic Development

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act authorizes small conveyances of federal lands to Custer and Blaine Counties and affected towns for public purposes, including such uses as public parks, a rod and gun club, cemetery, waste water transfer station, fire station, workforce housing, and a school bus turn around.

This bill also facilitates economic assistance to ranchers in the East Fork region of the Boulder-White Clouds who have seen grazing allotments reduced in recent years. Under the legislation, the Forest Service and BLM are authorized to accept and permanently retire grazing permits voluntarily donated by ranchers. Arrangements have been made through a private foundation to provide fair compensation, up to \$3 million.

Previous versions of this bill known as the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA) appropriated a total of \$6 million to Custer County for a community center and health clinic. The majority of this money has already been received.

Conclusion

After this discussion about the importance of this place, the long conservation and legislative history, the most important thing is to go back to the place. Central Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds have for generations provided jaw-dropping scenery, remote backcountry recreational opportunities, and memories to many that last a lifetime. To the east, the high tundra slopes of Jerry Peak are refuge to herds of big game animals. To the west, rare and elusive species such as wolverine and lynx hide in the high alpine sanctuary. In between these two 10,000 foot regions dips the low elevation river bottom, the East Fork of the Salmon River, creating a critical connection of habitat where animals can migrate between their winter and summer territory.

Throughout this large and diverse area, visitors can find quiet moments surrounded in scenic grandeur that will last with them forever. It is time to provide lasting protection for this Idaho gem.

I have personally been traveled in the Boulder-White Clouds and surrounding landscape for decades. I was part of the very first group to traverse the White Clouds on skis. I have caught fish in the lakes and streams; mended blistered feet formed from walking miles on remote trails; climbed 10,000-foot peaks; and swam in the cool alpine lakes. Around campfires and around congressional hearing tables in Washington I've been talking about finally getting this area protected for a very long time. My work has merely been carrying the same torch of those who have worked to protect Castle Peak and the Boulder-White Clouds for so long and for so many years. Until that torch is carried across the finish line, our work is not done.

These are national lands, public lands, held in trust by the federal government. While many of us who live in Idaho think of these lands as our own, the fact is they belong to all Americans for now

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and for generations to come. While we are far from the ramparts of Castle Peak today, where we are is totally appropriate, for it Congress that can provide this incredible landscape the protection it deserves.

This bill is the product of more than a decade of collaborative discussions and negotiations. It is the product of bridge building. It is far past the time to cross that bridge and get this done. The Idaho Conservation League stands in support of this legislation and whole-heartedly encourages Congress to move it forward so it can be signed into law.

I'd like to offer my thanks to Sen. Jim Risch and Rep. Mike Simpson for stepping up and carrying the torch for the Boulder-White Clouds.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

Attachments:

- Rep. Mike Simpson's Statement on Mountain Bikes
- Endorser list from an earlier version of Simpson's bill

March 9, 2015

Representative Mike Simpson Statement on Mountain Bikes

as Related to SNRA

I have recently introduced legislation that will create three new wilderness areas in the majestic Boulder-White Clouds and Jerry Peak areas. Under this proposal we will have wilderness from the doorstep of Ketchum (Hemingway-Boulders Wilderness), northward towards Stanley (White Clouds Wilderness), and across to the East Fork of the Salmon and beyond (Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness). These wilderness areas alone would encompass over 430 square miles of some of Idaho's most majestic peaks, valleys, lakes and streams. They embrace Idaho treasures that would remain in perpetual solitude for future generations to hike, climb, explore, fish and hunt in a manner that will not be disturbed by manmade activities.

My bill will also ensure that traditional recreational users such as snowmobilers, hunters, motorbikers, backpackers, day hikers, mountain bikers, heliskiers, outfitters, campers and others will be able to continue the recreational activities they have come to love and enjoy in the backcountry areas of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA). These diverse and historic recreational users are an important part of the SNRA and contribute significantly to the local economies of Stanley, Ketchum, and Challis.

Recently, I have heard concerns from some mountain biking advocates that my legislation will impact tourism and business in Idaho. It goes without saying that mountain biking is an important activity in the Boulder-White Clouds area. Mountain bikers significantly use and enjoy this area, and at the same time are strong supporters of local businesses.

The views and opinions of mountain bikers have been very important to me since I began work on CIEDRA over a decade ago. At that time, mountain bike advocates made it clear to me that the Fisher-Williams Loop was a prized trail and mountain biking experience; and I agreed it should not be wilderness or closed to mountain bikes.

While I am not a mountain biker, I have been told by members of the mountain bike community that my bill will continue to provide a wide variety of back country experiences for mountain bikers, from beginner to advanced-expert, on some of the most rugged and scenic high elevation trails in the United States.

For those advanced-expert mountain bikers, we leave open the epic Bowery Loop to the East Fork (Germania Creek Trail and Grand Prize/West Fork of East Fork Trails). This allows for loop access from Smiley Creek to the East Fork of the Salmon River and back – described as “abusive” in a mountain biking guidebook. This grueling 30 mile loop lies between the proposed White Clouds and Hemingway Boulders Wildernesses.

Additionally, the difficult Garland Lakes/Martin Creek Trail to Warm Springs Meadow, and Rough Creek and Lookout Mountain trails will remain open. Riders will see incredible scenery as they head up the Big and Little Casino Creek Trails, as well as the Boundary Creek, Gladiator Creek and Galena Gulch Trails.

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Mountain bikers who want to access the solitude of high mountain lakes can ride the Frog Lake Loop to remote Frog Lake and the Fourth of July Trail to Fourth of July Lake and Washington Lake. For a one of a kind ride, Railroad Ridge will remain open to mountain bikes. There is no place on earth like Railroad Ridge for views, scenery, fauna, geology and tranquility.

For those who are concerned about losing access to backcountry trails, backcountry is a term that refers to land that is isolated, undeveloped, remote and difficult to access. All of the trails I have mentioned are certainly backcountry trails.

When completed, the Galena Lodge mountain bike trail network will provide 54 miles of non-motorized trails that will offer opportunities for families and those of all skill levels. Sun Valley residents and recreational tourists will continue to have an abundance of mountain biking opportunities in and around the local area in the Pioneers and Smoky Mountains including Adams Gulch, Fox Creek, Chocolate Gulch, Oregon Gulch, Warm Springs Ridge, and Bear-Parker Gulch.

These are just a few of the many trails left open to mountain biking in the Boulder-White Clouds and Ketchum area. I firmly believe that some mountain bike advocates are undervaluing these incredible mountain biking experiences and opportunities.

I agree with mountain biking advocates when they tell me that having Ants Basin and Castle Divide trails in wilderness will be a loss of two very unique and incredible back country rides. I also agree with wilderness advocates when they tell me that this is the very reason why mountain bikes should not be allowed. The crux of the issue is that these trails are in the core of the proposed wilderness and have some, if not the most, scenic, undisturbed, and outstanding wilderness characteristics one can find.

While I am not certain that mountain bikes should be banned in all wilderness areas, the fact is they are. I cannot change that. Unfortunately, my bill seems to have become a proxy for a larger debate between mountain bike advocates and wilderness advocates on whether mountain bikes (or mountain bike corridors) should be allowed in wilderness areas. That needs to be resolved at a national level and not through area-specific legislation.

For those who are intent on leaving biking corridors open through the White Clouds and Hemingway-Boulders wildernesses, they do so knowing that the result will be the loss of 430 square miles of wilderness, and the ultimate protection that wilderness provides. They know that we would lose a plan that all recreational users can and should be able to live with. They know that acrimonious divisions over the management, implementation, and uses in the national monument will continue for some time.

Allowing corridors in the three proposed wilderness areas is non-negotiable, and the three wilderness areas in my bill will each remain undivided and without corridors. I am certain that anything less will result in a monument.

In regards to mountain bikers and their impact on the local and state economy, mountain biking advocates have told me that while they agree the Boulder-White Clouds deserve

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protection, if “critical adjustments” to my legislation are not made, then my bill “will gravely impact the tourism and business economy of rural Idaho and the state as a whole.”

I think this idea goes too far. I do not believe that if Ants Basin and Castle Divide trails are closed that no one will come to Ketchum or Stanley to mountain bike on the Fisher-Williams Loop, Frog Lake Loop, the epic Bowery Loop or all of the other remaining trails and loops that remain open. I firmly believe that there will continue to be significant riding opportunities to support a recreation economy based on mountain biking tourism.

I also believe that a national monument designation has the potential to disrupt all forms of recreation in the Boulder White Clouds or create a priority ranking where one form of recreation could be placed above or below others. My bill will ensure that mountain bikers and all traditional recreational users, both motorized and non-motorized, will be able to continue the recreational activities they have come to love and enjoy in the backcountry areas of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA).

Thank you for taking the time to read my views on the mountain biking issue. I would be interested in your thoughts or comments if you would like to provide them to me. Please email me with the subject line “Mountain Bikes” to: Simpson.SNRA@mail.house.gov

Sincerely,
Mike Simpson

The following organizations and individuals support all and/or part of the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (H.R. 163).

Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers
Blaine County
Boulder-White Clouds Council
City of Bellevue
City of Sun Valley
City Council of the City of Hailey
City Council of the City of Ketchum
City Council of the City of Stanley
Campaign for America's Wilderness
Chaco
Cooperative Wilderness Handicapped Outdoor Group
Custer County
Idaho AFL-CIO
Idaho Conservation League
Izaak Walton League of America
Living Independent Network Corporation
National Public Lands Grazing Campaign
National Wildlife Federation
Outdoor Industry Association
Pulp and Paper Workers Resources Council
The Wilderness Society
Sun Valley Adaptive Sports
Sawtooth Society
Sun Valley/Ketchum Chamber & Visitors Bureau
Trout Unlimited
United Steel Workers Local 712 and 608
Winter Wildlands Alliance

Cecil Andrus (D-ID), former Governor of Idaho and Former Secretary of the Department of Interior.

Bethine Church, former president of the Sawtooth Society and wife of the late Senator Frank Church (D-ID).

More than 7,000 Idahoans have written in support of Congressman Simpson's efforts.

More than 150 Idaho businesses support Congressman Simpson's efforts to protect the Boulder-White Clouds area as wilderness.

