

Chairman Grijalva and members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the invitation to submit testimony regarding H.R. 1975, and I sincerely hope you'll read it personally.

Nearly twenty years ago a group of well-respected scientists consulted with economists and drafted a proposal that would

- protect the Northern Rockies as an integrated, intact ecosystem;
- save the taxpayers roughly \$245 million dollars the first ten years after passage;
- and create jobs in the region.

They called it the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA). Its acronym is pronounced Ner-EE-pa.

I turned 65 this year. I've lived in Idaho for 30 years. That's longer than I've lived anywhere else. I've spent the last 17 of them working to pass NREPA. My four children are grown now. I have four grandchildren.

Over the years I've met with grass-roots citizens from the affected states who've been working tirelessly for NREPA's passage and defending areas within it against constant pressure from industrial interests and developers.

I'm thinking of

- the octogenarian Stewart Brandborg, who was actively involved in the successful effort to pass the Wilderness Act of 1964;
- Arlene Montgomery, Steve Kelly, and other Friends of the Wild Swan in Montana;
- Dave and Kathy Richmond, my neighbors downstream who work to protect wildlife and habitat in the mountains along Idaho's Salmon River;
- Howie Wolke, the outfitter who introduced me to Mike Bader, whose vision for an ecosystem bill was the seed from which NREPA grew;
- Mike Garrity and Gary MacFarlane, whose extensive knowledge about the legislation informs all of us;
- members of Friends of the Clearwater in Idaho; Alliance for the Wild Rockies in Montana; the Lands Council in Washington; Hells Canyon Preservation Council in Oregon, Wyoming Wilderness Association, and other groups representing a broad array of citizens in all five of the affected states who support NREPA; [Exhibit 1 – organization support list](#)
- business owners who know that the right thing for the bioregion is also the right thing for the region's economy. [Exhibit 2 – business support list](#)

But NREPA supporters don't come just from the five states. They come from around the country, from all walks of life, including but not limited to

- religious leaders;
- teachers;

- schoolchildren who collect pennies to pay for NREPA brochures and other materials;
- taxpayers who are tired of subsidizing the timber industry with their tax dollars;
- farmers, ranchers, outfitters, guides, photographers, hikers, hunters, anglers, and others who will benefit from the passage of NREPA;
- and a former president.

When Marilyn Bruya (an artist and now-retired professor) wrote to Jimmy Carter to ask for his support of NREPA, President Carter sent her letter back with a note on it in his handwriting saying:

To Marilyn Bruya –You may include me among the supporters of NREPA. Jimmy C.
[Exhibit 3 – Bruya letter with Carter note](#)

President Carter subsequently wrote a more formal letter of support, saying:

"NREPA heralds a new era in public lands management, based upon securing the integrity of the ecosystem in a biologically and economically sustainable way. NREPA is also cost-effective legislation. It will eliminate the practice of below-cost timber sales that have burdened taxpayers to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

"NREPA has the strong support of the American People, who own these public lands. At a time when only 5% of America's original pristine forests still remain, *it is our duty and obligation to protect and restore these national treasures* as we have enjoyed them and been sustained by them physically, mentally, and spiritually."

The italics are mine, as is this note:

The number of America's original pristine forests is now down to 3%.

Opponents downplay local support and complain about "top down" legislation. But I was there when NREPA's lead sponsors visited the region. They were welcomed by local supporters who thanked them for their leadership in introducing this national-interest legislation that will also benefit local communities.

"If we keep waiting for our own representatives to save the Northern Rockies," said a resident of one of the affected states, "it'll never happen."

"He's right," said another. "We can't afford to wait."

Mr. Chairman and members, I wish each and every one of you could see the vast, wild, unspoiled country out there. I wish every one of you could meet the supporters of NREPA. They're why I keep coming back to Capitol Hill every few months to convey their unshakable determination to protect that wild country and ensure the survival and biological diversity of every creature in the Northern Rockies, from the tiniest birds and mosquitoes—yes, even the mosquitoes!—to bull trout, wild salmon, grizzly, and caribou. I come and speak on behalf of ranchers and farmers who know that NREPA will protect

headwaters and keep water at higher elevations for use later in the season when it's most needed.

My neighbors in the greater Northern Rockies ecosystem live among bears, badgers, bunnies, beavers, otters, deer, elk, and moose. People who grew up there may take those things for granted but I don't. I grew up in New York, and the sheer size of the landscape and the wildlife it sustains are a constant wonder to me. They've informed my life and my songs, and in return I made a commitment to make sure we don't lose them.

When I first moved to Custer County in 1981, the creeks were orange with kokanee salmon. I haven't seen that many kokanee for a long time. In the winter months I snowshoe and ski on trails with wolf paw prints the size of a grapefruit. A couple of weeks ago I awoke to see a family of Canadian gray wolves less than 50 feet from my home: a male, a female and two pups. It was unnerving but magnificent—and a vivid reminder that I'm the one who moved into *their* neighborhood. My dog barked from a safe distance (where she prudently stayed.) I hoped her barking would encourage the wolves to move to a quieter and more distant location, which they did. The next morning I found a yearling elk in the upper meadow that the wolves had killed in a lupine version of grocery shopping.

The wolves could have hurt me or my dog, but they didn't. I could have hurt them, but I didn't. And so we co-exist.

Why shouldn't we protect places of sufficient size and ecological function where humankind can co-exist with wildlife? Why do some people object to legislation that allows wildlife to roam great distances without roads or motors? Why is it necessary for humankind to build roads everywhere?

Opponents of NREPA offer reasonable-sounding answers to these questions, but if you look behind the curtain you're likely to find industrial interests and developers who do not want to lose their taxpayer-subsidized benefits.

I find it interesting that advocates for off-road vehicle use say "lock up" when they talk about wilderness and "lock in" when they talk about off-road vehicle trails. And they have co-opted the word "recreation." "The recreation community" is widely understood these days to mean motorized trail users.

But use doesn't have to be motorized to qualify as "recreation." Hunters, anglers, hikers, skiers, people on horseback and other non-motorized users will still be able to enjoy their preferred method of recreation in NREPA's designated wilderness areas with respect and minimal impact without fear of being interrupted by the sound of a motor. If we don't protect the Northern Rockies ecosystem against such incursions, then motorized wilderness—an oxymoron, to be sure—will be the only kind of wilderness we'll have left.

NREPA comprises the largest area in the lower 48 where we can still preserve enough land to support a diverse range of wildlife. A protected Northern Rockies ecosystem with biological corridors will provide the room and maneuverability they need. Surely God's creatures have as much right to be there as we do.

In addition to the biological benefits, there are psychological benefits. Vast, wild places replenish the human spirit and give us sanctuary from an increasingly stressful world.

Experiences in the wild bring families together. They connect family members to each other and to the Creator of the natural environment around them. What they are experiencing in wilderness is not much different than what they might have experienced centuries ago. NREPA's passage will ensure that those same experiences are still there for you and your grandchildren. Wilderness is like stopping time. We need more places where we can stop time.

One day on a hike I was carrying my grandson in a backpack. As I watched him touch the rough bark of an old fir tree I could feel him absorbing his grandmother's love for the wild forest, just as trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and give us back oxygen.

As rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere play a crucial role in climate change, NREPA is a science-based solution that even a third-grader can understand. Trees turn carbon dioxide into oxygen. Large connected ecosystems full of old growth forests like those in the Northern Rockies absorb and store carbon. Scientists call this a "carbon sink." By protecting the Northern Rockies ecosystem, NREPA will significantly slow global warming and benefit the entire world.

A little NREPA history: when I first came to Capitol Hill in 1990 to meet with members of Congress about NREPA, few people even knew what an ecosystem was. I was with a group of five men from Idaho, Montana, and Oregon who, in their suits, ties, and dress shoes, were clearly not in their natural habitat, but if that's what it took to sit down with folks on Capitol Hill, they were willing to fly to DC and put on their town-goin' clothes.

Members and staff were kind enough to meet with us, but no one took the bill seriously. It was like that cartoon, where these little shmoo-like figures are rolling around on the floor laughing, and the caption is, "You want it *when???*"

For years we've heard the question "How are you going to get the bill through Congress?" Now we're hearing "How are you going to get President Bush to sign it?"

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee: give us the chance to persuade President Bush to sign NREPA, and we'll let you know how we did it.

Back to NREPA history: in 1991, Rep. Peter Kostmayer was NREPA's first lead sponsor.

In 1993, Rep. Carolyn Maloney took the lead and made a commitment not only to introduce NREPA, but to work hard for its passage.

In 1994, Chairman Bruce Vento held a hearing on NREPA before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands. There were no objections to the science, the economics, or the creation of jobs. The only objections were from westerners complaining about easterners telling them what to do. When Mrs. Maloney reminded members that the lands in question were (and still are) owned by *all* Americans, the objections got more vociferous and more personal. But there were still no objections to the science, the economics, or the creation of jobs.

In 1995, Rep. Christopher Shays joined Mrs. Maloney in advocating for NREPA. The bill grew to include as many as 187 bipartisan cosponsors in addition to Mr. Shays. Among its cosponsors were (and still are) members from some of the affected states.

Phrases from nay-sayers included "political reality;" "local solutions;" and "compromise."

Regarding compromise:

1. NREPA already has compromise built into it. Roughly 50% of the federal lands in the region will remain available for multiple use. This reflects the well-thought-out design of this bill by those who drafted it. They took into consideration that logging, road-building, and off-road vehicle use could not be completely stopped. The areas proposed as wilderness were carefully selected for their ecological value and integrity.
2. In 1994, when we met with then-Speaker Tom Foley, he asked if we could take the Washington wilderness out of the bill. We replied, "Mr. Speaker, it's an ecosystem bill. Without the wilderness protection in Washington, it won't function as an ecosystem."

So NREPA might have passed the House in 1994 without the Washington wilderness, but we couldn't compromise the science. We've been ignoring scientists' warnings about climate change for years. We ignore science at our peril. Meanwhile, the science in NREPA was so strong and prescient that this bill, drafted nearly two decades ago, had the biological corridors in it then that we know today will mitigate the effects of global warming on species in the region.

In recent years I've watched some wilderness advocates get caught up in an approach encouraged by certain funders during the years when the Resources Committee was, shall we say, not inclined towards wilderness protection? Some groups whose

mission statements include wilderness protection became so frustrated with the failure to pass clean wilderness bills that they focused on achievable victories. In some cases “achievable” meant accepting *quid pro quo* conditions inconsistent with their group’s advocacy for things like the Wilderness Act of 1964, public land remaining in public hands, and the need to protect areas of sufficient size and connectivity to sustain wildlife populations.

Proponents of one such bill admit their bill isn’t perfect, but, they say, “we mustn’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.”

First of all, I would argue (and have argued in both chambers) that a bill that gives away thousands of acres of nationally owned public land isn’t “the good.” But more to the point, when you have the chance to pass a bill like NREPA that is the right solution for so many problems, there’s no need to settle for less.

As for “local solutions,” if the mayor of New York decided to dismantle the Statue of Liberty and give the arm to Staten Island, the torch to Brooklyn and the crown to The Bronx, the people from the five NREPA states would have every right—and indeed, the obligation—to insist that this icon of American freedom and democracy remain intact.

Chopping up an ecosystem to meet local political needs is equally inappropriate. We cannot accept “local solutions” that divide parts of a national treasure among competing local interests. It’s wrong for the American people and it’s wrong for local communities.

The long-term economic health of communities is better when they’re adjacent to large, intact wilderness areas. In the past a social climate of negativity towards conservation activists prevailed in many rural communities, but a growing number of people in these communities are starting to realize that their longstanding antipathy toward wilderness is hurting them economically.

Studies affirm that protecting large intact wilderness is the best investment in the long-term economy of adjacent communities. You’ll see ghost towns all over the west where an economy based on an extractive industry has petered out, but you won’t see a single ghost town where the economy is based on adjacent wilderness. When you drive into Stanley or Challis (near where I live) you’ll see signs proclaiming each town a gateway to wilderness. The signs do *not* say “Gateway to Off Road Vehicle Trails” or “Gateway to Cyanide Heap Leach Mines.”

Last year, anglers spent roughly \$28 million in Custer County.

I have trouble understanding why my county commissioners are failing to make the connection between the wild and scenic rivers in NREPA, a healthy population of wild salmon and steelhead, and \$28 million dollars a year to a single county from anglers alone.

I have trouble understanding why some elected officials aren't making the connection between the severe erosion caused by the motorized trail vehicles they're fighting so hard to allow in inappropriate places, and the degradation of habitat of the fish that bring so much money to their county.

Michelangelo said, "The greatest danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark."

Imagine if Michelangelo had set *his* aim lower. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel would not exist.

The Northern Rockies ecosystem is America's Sistine Chapel. In fact, many people would agree that no man-made church, temple, or other religious structure could approach the magnificence of God's own cathedrals made of mountains, forests, and the limitless sky.

We're lucky enough to have had some of those places already protected by such visionary forebears as:

Gifford Pinchot: "The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future."

John F. Kennedy: "It is our task in our time and in our generation, to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours."

Rachel Carson: "It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know of wonder and humility."

And Theodore Roosevelt: "Leave it as it is. The ages have been at work on it and man can only mar it."

Mr. Chairman and members, it's your turn now. You're charged with the responsible stewardship of the nationally owned public lands in the Northern Rockies ecosystem, and the American people are counting on you to rise to that responsibility.

I've met with many of you, and I'm confident that not only will you rise to the occasion, you will lift others—including my friends and colleagues who've worked for so long to protect wilderness but in recent years have lost hope and heart.

To my friends and colleagues I say, let NREPA embolden you. Let this visionary legislation and the unwavering commitment of its supporters energize you to seek solutions that are true to the values of wilderness and wildlife preservation that have been the underlying principles of your work for so many years. NREPA is a worthy and well-crafted solution. You don't have to settle for less.

To you, Mr. Chairman and members, I say, give these good people the inspiration that comes with success. Remind them that when Americans aim high, we touch the stars.

Take this opportunity to protect the Northern Rockies ecosystem; create jobs; and save your constituents money. The people who wrote this bill have made it easy for you to do the right thing. All you have to do to stop the nay-sayers is say YES to NREPA.

A YES vote will affirm your responsibility to the Creator, to your constituents, to a majority of the American people, and to our troops. Why the troops? Because the Northern Rockies are as much a part of the America they are fighting to protect as freedom and democracy.

With NREPA based on sound science and solid economics, and with *all* Americans owning the lands under consideration, Congress has an affirmative obligation to protect the Northern Rockies ecosystem against motorized incursions and destruction and, where possible, to restore damaged areas as close as possible to the way they were created.

Summing up: passing NREPA will

- protect some of America's most beautiful and ecologically important lands;
- save taxpayers money;
- create new jobs;
- keep water available at higher elevations until it's needed for farmers and ranchers downstream;
- mitigate the effects of global warming on species in the Northern Rockies; and
- slow global warming by protecting this bioregion as a large carbon sink.

There are many ways for people to misuse our public land. Calling those ways "wise use" doesn't make them wise. The fact that we have any protected land at all in this country is because people like Frank Church, Bruce Vento, Jimmy Carter, Jack Kennedy, Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot and other sagacious leaders took action to protect these extraordinary places for future generations.

I hope you'll follow their lead and vote YES on NREPA. It's a legacy worthy of your great-grandchildren.
