

Testimony of Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1975,
the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA)
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Thursday, October 18, 2007, at 2:00 p.m.
1334 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, members of the subcommittee, I thank you for allowing me to be here this afternoon to testify about H.R. 1975, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act.

So far this Congress, NREPA has garnered the support of 115 bipartisan cosponsors from 35 states. It has deep grassroots support in the areas affected by the legislation. It is supported by the Sierra Club, The Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Friends of the Clearwater, and hundreds of other organizations and local businesses in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Mr. Chairman, I know there will be a healthy discussion of the bill this afternoon. I want to start out by talking generally about what the bill does and what it doesn't do. I'm pleased that later you'll hear testimony from experts from the region, some of whom have been working on NREPA for even longer than I have.

NREPA differs from traditional state-by-state wilderness bills by offering a variety of designations that work in concert to achieve one goal: the protection of entire functioning ecosystems on federal public lands. These are lands that belong to all American taxpayers. We all have a right and responsibility to protect our precious resources.

First, NREPA protects over 24 million acres of America's premiere roadless lands as wilderness. Most of this land is not suitable for timber harvest or mining. According to Dr. Thomas Power, recently retired chairman of the Department of Economics at the University of Montana, only 20% of the land designated in NREPA is even suitable for timber harvest.

NREPA will also protect the rivers and streams that are the last habitats for many of America's wild trout stocks, by protecting 1800 miles of river and streams as wild and scenic rivers.

Most importantly, NREPA emphasizes that all of these wild places are linked together in the most vital ways possible. By protecting natural biological corridors, NREPA connects the region's core wildlands into a functioning ecological whole. Scientists tell us that you can't realistically try to protect these unique lands and everything that lives within them without thinking of the entire ecosystem.

NREPA also creates jobs by putting people to work restoring the land in wildland restoration and recovery areas designated in the bill.

We all recognize and agree that as far as logging on federal lands goes, it only provides jobs because the government and the taxpayers provide millions and millions of dollars of subsidies to the timber industry. These forests are money losers. Ultimately the American taxpayers are paying so that logging can continue in these particular federal forests. NREPA saves taxpayers money by prohibiting road building and logging in the areas designated as wilderness.

Finally, I want to be very clear about what NREPA doesn't do. NREPA does not impact private landowners. It impacts only federal public lands—lands owned by all Americans.

Now, you'll certainly hear some people say that NREPA is a "top-down" approach. This could not be further from the truth. In the early 1990's local scientists, economists, conservation leaders, researchers, and others in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Washington and Oregon became concerned with the fragmenting of these precious, rare lands. The potential loss of wildlife and their way of life if something was not done to protect the Northern Rockies prompted the legislation that is now NREPA. These people in the region went to the Alliance for the Wild Rockies to write this bill. And then, when those local advocates went to their elected officials, no one had the vision or courage to sponsor the bill. This is what they told me. So, people in the region had to seek out other legislators to support their vision. I would not be here today if it were not for the local grassroots advocates, scientists, economists, conservation leaders who have been championing NREPA for years. NREPA could not be further from a "top-down" approach.

I hope you will continue to debate these issues in a thoughtful and responsible way. If nothing else, the American people should take comfort in the fact that we continue to debate how much land to protect instead of whether to protect land at all.

Some years ago, two NREPA supporters from Manhattan, *Montana* wrote to me and said "We feel that there is a little ray of hope for the incredible but dwindling wildlands we are so lucky to live near and love." All of us have a responsibility to sustain that hope.

Again, I thank Chairman Grijalva for allowing me to be here today and for holding this hearing. Thank you.