

**House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**  
**Testimony on H. R. 1975**  
**by**  
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**Americans for Responsible Recreational Access**  
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Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify on H. R. 1975, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. My name is Larry E. Smith and I serve as Executive Director of Americans for Responsible Recreational Access (ARRA). ARRA is an organization that promotes the responsible use of our public lands for a variety of recreational uses including horseback riding, senior citizens active in the outdoors, off-highway vehicle and snowmobile riders and other outdoor enthusiasts.

To say that H. R. 1975 is far reaching legislation is an understatement. We are not opposed to creating new wilderness areas when and where appropriate, but we do have serious reservations about any legislation that seeks to change the management of more than 23 million acres of public land in one fell swoop. The magnitude of this measure is too much to comprehend and has the markings of a legislative process run amok. H. R. 1975 seems more akin to a major rewrite of our tax laws or the annual omnibus appropriations measure; too large and complicated for any member of Congress to understand with the potential danger that after final passage, too many unintended consequences will emerge that will prove too difficult to fix. I am not sure this is the way to legislate new policy governing the use of our public lands.

H. R. 1975 covers public lands in five western states, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Wyoming. The legislation would designate new wilderness areas totaling more than 23 million acres and nearly 2,000 miles of wild and scenic rivers. I am not here to suggest that some of this designation isn't appropriate or needed. What I am here to suggest is that it is humanly impossible to understand the far reaching ramifications of this bill.

If the authors of H. R. 1975 are serious about this measure, why not divide the legislation up into five separate bills, one for each state affected? Hearings then could be held not only here in the Nation's Capital, but more importantly, out in the actual states where these designations will occur. Why not seek out the opinion of the local citizens and governmental entities most affected by these policy decisions?

One of the areas slated for expansion under H.R. 1975 is the Hells Canyon Recreation Area in eastern Oregon. Back in the 1970's, I worked for a Senator from the State of Oregon who was the original sponsor of the Hells Canyon designation. The legislation, when introduced, had already been carefully vetted with citizens groups in Oregon, state

and local government officials as well as the pertinent federal agencies. This was not a top down process coming from the Nation's Capital, but rather a process that began in the State of Oregon and had the consensus of Oregonians before Congress was even asked to consider the legislation.

It seems to me this is the preferable way for moving wilderness legislation forward. First, seek the support of the local communities surrounding the area in question and then seek the support of the Congress...in that order and not the other way around. To be honest, I am highly suspect of any wilderness legislation so massive in size that it comprises an area larger than the States of New York, Connecticut, Vermont and Rhode Island combined. I am highly suspect of any wilderness legislation that affects five western states when the prime sponsor hails from Manhattan. While the author's intentions are no doubt well meaning, I would have greater comfort about the scope of this legislation if it were undertaken by the very members elected to represent these affected congressional districts.

I note that not one House member representing the affected areas has chosen to co-sponsor H. R. 1975. What is the message of this lack of endorsement? Maybe it means that the local citizens of the affected areas also fail to see any merit in H. R. 1975.

Mr. Chairman, since the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, some marvelous and special areas in our country have been preserved in a state "where the Earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Since 1964, Congress has done a very good job of finding and so designating such areas. Today, we find that nearly 700 tracts of land encompassing a whopping 106.6 million acres are in the wilderness system. To put the current size of the wilderness system into perspective, it's the equivalent of the total land mass of California and Maryland combined.

Should Congress designate more wilderness areas? Maybe. But before doing so, it should seek the input of those American citizens most affected by such decisions. Before doing so, it should find out what the economic and social impact such designations will have on those citizens living in the vicinity of these areas.

Break H. R. 1975 apart into five separate bills. Then take each measure and ask local citizens what they think of the potential designation. And if the response is in the affirmative like it was when the original Hells Canyon Recreation Area was proposed, then give each the Congressional seal of approval. Our public lands deserve nothing less than a serious, deliberative process. Mega-bills like H. R. 1975 are not an appropriate vehicle for protecting public lands for future generations. There must be a better way. There is a better way, and I hope this subcommittee and committee reaches out to those who know these areas best, the people who live and work there.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in addition to my statement being made a part of the record of this hearing, I would also like to submit a copy of an Op-Ed that I wrote on the subject of wilderness legislation that appeared in the September 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the Washington Times.