

Testimony of:  
Andy Oliver, Consultant  
The Wilderness Land Trust



House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
April 16, 2013

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Andy Oliver and I am a consultant for the Wilderness Land Trust. We are a small not-for-profit organization focused on protecting designated wilderness by working cooperatively with landowners who own private property within designated and proposed wilderness areas. We acquire such properties from willing sellers with the intent to transfer ownership to the United States.

Last year our President, Reid Haughey, testified that continued modest funding of the Inholding Accounts for the four land management agencies within the Land and Water Conservation Fund is vital to the success of securing and preserving wilderness designated by Congress, while treating private landowners within these areas fairly.

I am before you today to thank you for your support for such modest funding in Fiscal Year 2013 and to ask for that support once again. An appropriation of between \$3 and 5 million to each of the land management agencies, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service, is sufficient to enable the agencies to acquire high priority inholdings from willing sellers. Support for these accounts:

- Saves money by eliminating management inefficiencies that frequently exceed the cost of acquisition;
- Helps private landowners within federally designated wilderness and other conservation areas; and
- Allows the agencies to act when opportunities occur to acquire inholdings, often only once a generation.

**The Wilderness Land Trust**

P.O. Box 1420, Carbondale, Colorado 81623 ~ 970.963.1725, fax 970.963.6067  
Arizona ~ Washington ~ 480.444.8707      California ~ 415.606.5895

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We are not asking Congress to undertake a new acquisition program or to significantly increase current appropriation levels. We ask that Congress continue to complete the wilderness areas it has designated, and to provide private landowners who wish to sell the opportunity to transfer their land within those wilderness areas to public ownership.

The program to acquire inholdings in designated wilderness areas has a 50-year track record of proven success. As a measure of this success, over the last 20 years the Wilderness Land Trust has completed the acquisition of 366 parcels totaling 38,333 acres, or nearly 60 square miles of land within 85 designated and proposed wilderness areas. Our work has completed 12 wilderness areas in eight States, eliminating development threats and assuring that future generations can enjoy the enduring resources of wilderness.

Other organizations have made progress as well. For example, in FY2012, funding for the Forest Service critical inholdings program secured 24 acquisitions in 16 states. The average cost of the acquisitions was \$105,714 and the average size was 153.8 acres.

Consistent funding for the inholding accounts is vital. Without consistent funding, numerous opportunities to acquire private parcels within designated wilderness areas and other congressionally identified areas worthy of protection will be lost, often for at least another generation.

This year, critical acquisitions cannot be completed without a commitment to inholding acquisition. For example:

- The only inholding within the Hells Canyon Wilderness in Idaho has been offered for sale by the family that has long owned it. Acquisition of this key parcel will complete the wilderness, help this family with its generational change and keeps the promise that when wilderness inholders want to sell, the United States will acquire their properties now surrounded by designated wilderness;
- East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness in Nevada includes historic reminders of the settlement of the west in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. It also includes one remaining inholding. When transferred to federal ownership this wilderness will be complete and the family ranching operation will be successfully reorganized so the next generation will continue; and,
- The Elkhorn Ridge Wilderness is less than 1/4 of a mile from Highway 101 in Northern California. But “you can’t get there from here”. The access to the wilderness is blocked by 40 acres of private land. When acquired, this beloved wilderness that stretches toward the sea from Highway 101 will be accessible to the many youth groups that covet this summit to sea hiking and educational wilderness experience.

Since last year, a total of 9 properties in four states, Arizona, California, Colorado and Nevada have been acquired and transferred or are in the process of being

transferred to federal ownership by The Wilderness Land Trust. Other organizations have done additional work. The average purchase price of the properties we transferred this past year that were paid for through the inholding accounts was \$85,883 apiece, at less than \$1,000 per acre. Pretty low. The support you showed for these transactions inspired the donation of just over \$3.2 million of wilderness inholdings in the same period through our organization. This exemplifies the commitment of your constituents to the acquisition of wilderness inholdings and the fair treatment of inholding landowners.

There is more work to be done. Within the boundaries of our federally designated Wilderness Areas there remain more than 400,000 acres of privately owned land. While the Wilderness Act defines Wilderness Areas as places where “the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” private landowners rightly retain their rights to build roads, homes and other buildings, extend utilities, and extract minerals and timber.

We have projects ready to go and queued up with the owners of inholdings within wilderness. Additional opportunities are emerging in the Owyhees Wilderness Areas and throughout the west. The Trust is actively negotiating with –

- More than a dozen owners in multiple States, including Colorado, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Idaho, Washington and Oregon.
- We’ve received the donation of seven parcels in Nevada from a land owner who wants to support the ongoing acquisition of wilderness inholdings.
- Deep in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness of Oregon is a private property originally patented for its timber value. Now the owner wants to dredge the adjacent wild and scenic river for gold.

The management of these human activities in wilderness is expensive for the agencies. The potential resource damage to the protected lands and waters is enormous. The cost of acquiring these properties when they are offered for sale is relatively small.

If you fund the inholding accounts, we will be back next year with more stories of success completing already designated wilderness and helping those private landowners, who often feel trapped within designated wilderness, but were promised that their land would be purchased at a fair market price if they chose to sell.

In summary, continued consistent funding of the inholding accounts is vital. Without such funding, significant opportunities to acquire private parcels within our designated wilderness areas will be lost for at least another generation. We urge your support of funding for these accounts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate your time and consideration and the support of the Subcommittee in securing these appropriations. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.