

Testimony of:
Mr. Reid Haughey, President
The Wilderness Land Trust

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
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Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Reid Haughey and I am the President of the Wilderness Land Trust. We are a small not-for-profit organization focused on protecting designated wilderness. To do this, we work in partnership with landowners who own private property within designated and proposed wilderness areas and the agencies that manage these areas. We acquire properties from willing sellers with the intent to transfer ownership to the United States. My testimony focuses on a very small portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund – funding for the Inholding Acquisition Accounts for the four land management agencies. Continued modest funding of the Inholding Accounts is vital to the success of securing and preserving wilderness already designated by Congress, while treating private landowners within these areas fairly.

The management of human development activities in wilderness is expensive for the agencies. The potential resource damage to the protected lands and waters is enormous. By contrast, the cost of acquiring these properties when they are offered for sale is relatively small. That is why it is so important to continue the modest appropriations needed for the inholding acquisition program.

As we approach the 2014 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, I am before you today to thank you for funding the Inholdings Accounts in Fiscal Year 2014 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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- Completes designated wilderness areas, removing threats from incompatible and harmful development within their boundaries.

We are not asking Congress to undertake a new acquisition program or to significantly increase current appropriation levels. As 2014 is the 50th Anniversary of The Wilderness Act, we ask Congress to continue its 50-year commitment 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 by prioritizing the use of the inholding accounts for the acquisition of inholdings within and adjacent to designated wilderness areas. Focusing the inholding accounts on designated wilderness and funding the Forest Service Wilderness Inholdings core project will be money well spent, completing established Congressional designations and taking care of landowners who still own lands within these now-designated wildernesses.

So, why worry? Aren't wilderness areas secured when Congress designates them? All designations include language that authorize the federal acquisition of private lands within these areas and, once acquired, automatically protect them as part of the designated wilderness that surrounds them. As part of our celebration of the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the Trust has commissioned an inventory of private lands within wilderness. The results are startling. The report determined that within the lower 48 states, 180,000 acres of private lands still remain. There are also 440,000 acres of state owned lands.

This represents tremendous progress reducing private inholdings in wilderness over the last 20 years. When the Trust last estimated the amount of private land within designated wilderness in the lower 48 states, we estimated there were 400,000 acres of private lands. It has taken decades of steady work to reduce that by more than half. During the same timeframe, 507 new or additional areas were congressionally designated, adding close to 29 million acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System. So, true progress indeed. Large appropriations for the inholding accounts did not accomplish this success - just steady, modest funding so that lands can be purchased when landowners want to sell. This is the level of funding we are hoping to continue.

These designated lands are worthy of completion. Landowners who are ready to sell deserve to have their properties purchased. Their isolated properties are primarily the result of 19th century Congressional policy when homesteads, mining operations and timber production were encouraged without the balance of conservation. As a result, wilderness areas now dedicated by Congress are pockmarked with islands of private ownership that compromise the wilderness resource, where "even man is a visitor who shall not remain", become expensive management issues for the agencies and often befuddle landowners who wish to sell these properties for the benefit of their companies or families.

Why is consistent funding for the inholding accounts vital? We have learned that these lands become available about once a generation. Our 20 years of steady work has shown that about 5 percent of the properties within wilderness come up for sale in any one year. If the opportunity to acquire these when offered is lost, the management issues and

inefficiencies that result from private lands remaining within designated wilderness continue. Without consistent funding, numerous opportunities to acquire these private parcels will be lost. Not for a year, but often for at least another generation.

Many inholding acquisitions secure access. However, the Forest Service FY 2015 Budget Request to alter the purpose of the inholdings acquisition program to focus solely on recreational access would undermine the success of the program. Acquiring inholdings secures access where it is now blocked by private land within the Forest Service boundary – in our case within designated wilderness. The Recreational Access idea is a new program that aims to expand federal ownership to include access easements outside current Forest Service boundaries. We do not have a position on the merits or need for such an expansion of Forest Service management responsibilities. We are here to simply to say that the aim of the new program is not the same as the inholdings acquisition program and should be evaluated on its own merits, not substituted for a 50-year proven effort specifically authorized by Congress. We urge you to assure the continued success of the inholdings acquisition program by maintaining the traditional use of the accounts for all four land management agencies and prioritizing wilderness acquisitions in any FY 2015 appropriations legislation.

This year, critical acquisitions will not be completed without a commitment to fund the inholding accounts. Last year we told the Committee about three critical projects we were working to acquire:

- The only inholding within the Hells Canyon Wilderness in Idaho was offered for sale by the family that long owned it. We bought it and are in the process of transferring it to Federal ownership. Buying this key 10 acre mining claim parcel completed the wilderness, helped the family with its generational change and kept the promise that when wilderness inholders want to sell, the United States will acquire their properties.
- East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness in Nevada includes historic reminders of the settlement of the west in the mid-19th Century. It also included one remaining 320 acre inholding. Now transferred to federal ownership, this wilderness is complete and the family ranching operation that used to own it successfully reorganized so the next generation will continue their ranching business and tradition.
- The Elkhorn Ridge Wilderness is less than one quarter 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 by BLM, 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. We bought it and are now working through the transfer to BLM to create much needed public access and preserve the 50-year tradition of wilderness education at the summer camp on the property.

We’ve also been able to help other private landowners and secure other wilderness areas. Among them –

- A timber company in northern California that is re-aligning its landownership and has worked with the Trust to sell its property, opening access to the Castle Crags Wilderness from the east and the nearby freeway. The newly created access to the nearby wilderness has the potential to provide significant new economic opportunities for the nearby hard-hit community of Dunsmere to develop recreation-based businesses.
- And, a landowner who built a cabin at a former gold mine on the banks of the Salmon River within the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. We will work over the next year to clean up the mine site to protect the river. The transfer of this property to federal ownership will further consolidate protection of the wilderness and enhance the recreational opportunities so economically important to Idaho and as a resource for the nation.

The expenses of managing these isolated private lands do not fall solely on the federal government. Tax revenues received by local governments do not offset the cost of providing fire protection, emergency and general government services to these isolated and far flung properties. It costs more to serve these isolated single properties than the tax revenue they generate. If you fund the inholding accounts, we will be back next year with more stories of success:

- Success completing already designated wilderness,
- Success 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,
- Success helping local governments control costs,
- Success helping land management agencies reduce costs of management and fire suppression.

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 continued funding for these accounts and for the Forest Service's Wilderness Inholdings core project.

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.