

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

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
March 18, 2015



Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Reid Haughey and I am the President of the Wilderness Land Trust. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My testimony focuses on a very small portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) – 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 Trust is 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.

Last year marked the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act of 1964 that established our National Wilderness Preservation System. As part of our celebration of the 50th anniversary, the Trust commissioned a national inventory of private lands within wilderness. The results are startling. The report determined that within the lower 48 states, 175,863 acres of private lands still remain in 2,883 parcels. There are also 440,000 acres of state owned lands.

When the Trust started work 23 years ago, we estimated there were 400,000 acres of private land within designated wilderness in the lower 48 states. It has taken steady work to reduce that by more than half. Large appropriations for the Inholding Accounts did not accomplish this success - just reliable, modest funding so that lands can be purchased when landowners want to sell. This is the level of funding we are hoping to continue.

I am before you today to thank you for funding the Inholdings Accounts in Fiscal Year 2015 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.

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

Follow our progress from our website
www.wildernesslandtrust.org

Our work, along with that of many other organizations and facilitated by funding of the Inholding Accounts, aims to give the Federal government less work. Eliminating private inholdings within designated wilderness:

- Saves Federal dollars
- Solves management and resource problems
- Helps private landowners, and
- Increases recreational access and economic development

Saving Federal dollars

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. While steady progress has been made reducing private inholdings in wilderness areas in the lower 48 states, our wilderness areas remain riddled with private inholdings that greatly threaten the wilderness that surrounds them and creates a “Swiss cheese” effect. While The Wilderness Act defines Wilderness as places where “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” private landowners retain their rights to build roads, homes and other buildings, extend utilities, extract minerals and timber, and block public access. There are numerous cases where such inholdings have been developed in ways that seriously degrade wilderness values on the adjacent public lands. All of these activities pose challenges for Federal managers of the lands surrounding private inholdings and create significant and costly management inefficiencies. 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.

For example, the Trust acquired a property in the Hells Canyon Wilderness in Arizona several years ago that ended 38 years of on and off litigation over access. This saved the agency a lot of ongoing costs. It made the landowner happy and completed the wilderness that surrounded it.

Further, as you are well aware, the costs associated with firefighting on public lands are enormous. The Wilderness Land Trust may be the only landowner within designated wilderness that can say it has experienced both sides of reducing firefighting costs. A property we owned in the heart of California’s Yolla Bolly Wilderness burned while we owned it. Significant resources were spent to protect the structures on it, risking life and limb, as well as money.

On the other hand, the Trust’s Hells Canyon Wilderness property in Idaho burned one week after it was transferred to Federal ownership. No one cared; no one came out to protect it. It burned as part of the natural process of wilderness and firefighting efforts rightly concentrated at the edges of the wildland-urban interface.

Specific data on firefighting expenses are difficult to get. The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition, a State and Federal government partnership whose members include 23 State

and Pacific Island Foresters, 7 Western Regional Foresters, 3 Western Research Station Directors, The Forest Products Lab Director of the USDA Forest Service, published a report: *The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western US* in April 2009. Among the case studies reviewed, the lowest total cost per acre firefighting expense was the Canyon Fire Complex in Montana (2000). The total cost was \$411 per acre. There were only six structures involved. The highest cost per acre was the 2000 Cerro Grande fire in New Mexico. It cost \$22,634 per acre. There were 260 residences involved. This is strong evidence that the presence of private lands and structures within public landscapes exponentially increases the cost of firefighting.

Not all the costs of managing these isolated parcels fall on the Federal Government. As the manager of Pitkin County, Colorado I learned firsthand that the expenses of providing services to these isolated properties far exceed the tax revenues received and do not come close to offsetting the cost of providing fire protection, emergency services, road, school buses 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.

Solves management and resource problems

The Inholding Accounts have been used to acquire mines from private owners, private retreats, and various properties that include the spectrum of non-wilderness uses. We are currently readying for transfer to Federal ownership a former mine in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. We've closed the former un-reclaimed mine on the banks of the Wild and Scenic Salmon River. The transfer will remove a private home and no trespassing signs on one of the few flat spots on that stretch of river. It will be returned to the public, who can enjoy being able to stop there and learn about past mining days, camp or fish from land on which the abandoned and open mine is now reclaimed and closed – no longer a threat to the public, or to the Wild and Scenic River from its open shafts deep into the alluvium of the river.

Recent purchases funded from the Inholding Accounts have secured access to the east side of the Ventana Wilderness in California, secured trails through the Wabayuma Peak Wilderness in Arizona and the Glacier Peak Wilderness in Washington and created access to a recently designated wilderness in Idaho. More are on the way.

Helps private landowners

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, 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.

This is why consistent funding for the Inholding Accounts is vital. We have learned that these lands become available about once a generation. It has been our experience that these critical inholdings come on the market at a steady rate as owners make decisions

based on their family or business needs. About 3 to 5 percent come on the market every year – once a generation. If the opportunity to meet the seller’s need is missed, it averages another 20 years before the opportunity comes again.

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.

Increases recreational access and economic development

On the east side of the Castle Crags Wilderness in California is a wall of private land that blocks access from Interstate 5. The nearby community of Dunsmuir is wholly supportive of transferring these lands to Federal ownership and opening up the Crags to visitation. Dunsmuir anticipates visitors that will come to the community and its climbing, biking and skiing shops it is hoped will grow to replace the loss of logging jobs. Dunsmuir has been suffering under an unemployment rate of 18% and looks forward to having the recreational asset of the Crags’ world class climbing only one mile off Interstate 5 and just outside their community – rather than a 7-mile hike around the private lands that now block access.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that wilderness inholdings come in many shapes, sizes and prices depending on the real estate market in a particular area. A number of projects that fall in the agency project lists are inholdings. Thus, we ask that you give the highest level of support possible for Federal LWCF acquisitions.

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 as much support for Federal LWCF acquisitions as possible. 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;
- Allows the agencies to act when opportunities occur to acquire inholdings, often only once a generation; and
- Completes designated wilderness areas, removing threats from incompatible and harmful development within their boundaries.

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.