

Rep. French Hill (AR-02)  
Natural Resources Committee Member Day  
Subject: Flatside Wilderness and Recovering America's Wildlife Act  
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- Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva,
- Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today.
- Before I get into my remarks about my legislation, I wanted to briefly comment on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.
- This remains a strategic priority for the House and Senate.
- And it speaks directly to federalism and successful partnerships with our state wildlife agencies.

- I know the Chairman and Committee staff are working hard to get a product introduced that meets the nation's conservation goals while also taking into account and understanding our country's fiscal environment.
  
- And I want to say thank you for focusing on this important effort.
  
- I am here today to discuss an issue that is important to my district and to me as an outdoorsman and conservationist.
  
- This story goes all the way back to the 98<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1984.
  
- One of my predecessors, Congressman Ed Bethune, and Senator Dale Bumpers, introduced the Arkansas Wilderness Act that Congress.

- At the time I was a staffer on the Senate Banking Committee for Senator John Tower of Texas.
  
- And through my connection to the outdoors and Arkansas, I persuaded Senator Tower to cosponsor Senator Bumpers' bill, which was signed into law in October 1984.
  
- That bill created Flatside Wilderness, which is in Perry County, Arkansas in my district.
  
- When I came to Congress in 2015, I started working on possible strategies to enhance Flatside Wilderness and was successful in adding 640 acres to the western edge of Flatside, when my bill, the Flatside Wilderness Enhancement Act, was signed into law by President Trump.

- Following that success, I worked with Arkansas's Senior Senator, John Boozman, to have the U.S. Forest Service conduct a study of the federal lands directly adjacent to Flatside to see if they also qualified as Wilderness.
- These acres were actually proposed in 1984, but did not make it in the final package.
- That was completed in the summer of 2021, and recommended the studied areas for Wilderness designation.
- These lands are currently managed by the Forest Service as potential Wilderness in accordance with the Ouachita National Forest Management Plan.

- After working with Chairman Westerman and his team over the past two years, I recently introduced H.R. 3971, the Flatside Wilderness Additions Act.
- This bill would designate approximately 2,200 existing forest service acres to Flatside Wilderness.
- In addition to numerous private conservation organizations supporting my legislation, we have formal letters of support from Arkansas's Governor Sarah Sanders, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism, and the Perry County Judge.
- This bill would be the second and final iteration to expand the wilderness area at Flatside.

- The other land that surrounds Flatside is either a part of the Ouachita National Forest and is not suitable for wilderness designation or is privately owned.
  
- Chairman Westerman knows my work here well, but I feel it is necessary to make this appeal to my fellow members from the West.
  
- I know and recognize the concerns my Western state colleagues have with the management of federal lands in their states.
  
- But, I invite you to consider we in the East and South often have a different relationship, as the Chairman will share, with our state, federal, and private conservation organizations as well as with the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas.

- While some of my colleagues may be skeptical for further Wilderness designations, there is something special about hiking, rock climbing, camping, or hunting deep in the back country of our extraordinary nation that look as if they are untouched by human hands.
- To conclude, this area is in my district, I have the support and recommendation for Wilderness designation by the Forest Service, I have the support of national, state, and local stakeholders, and, as the Chairman well knows, I have answered every question his staff has had along the way.
- This can be an example going forward of the proper due diligence and work required to ensure these designations meet every test.
- I ask for your support and want to thank the committee again for holding this member day.

- I look forward to answering any of your questions.