

Statement of Congressman Mike Simpson
H.R. 1728
House Natural Resources Committee
April 5, 2017

Thank you Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for allowing me the opportunity to testify on H.R. 1728 – legislation I introduced with my colleague from Idaho and a member of your committee, Congressman Raul Labrador.

Let me begin by stating that finding common ground is never easy. It takes willing participants and open lines of communication. However, by our very nature, Idahoans are solution based individuals. The agreement I am testifying on today, was born at the local level, with support from conservation groups, utility companies, and local and state officials who benefit from both affordable electricity and protected conservation landscapes.

As some of you know, the Gateway West Transmission Line Project was jointly proposed by Idaho Power and Rocky Mountain Power in 2007 to provide electricity to meet the increasing demands in western states. The transmission line covers 1,000 miles between Glenrock, Wyoming and Melba, Idaho. The project generates economic impacts to the tune of \$3.5 billion in private investment and results in more than 1,200 jobs over that six and a half year life of the project.

Economic development and affordable electricity are cornerstones of the Gateway West Transmission Line. However, that certainly doesn't mean the project is at the expense of conservation.

The legislation before you today strikes a key balance between conservation practices and efficient uses of public lands. Specifically, H.R. 1728 deals with segments of the transmission line that cross the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey Conservation Area. The conservation area is unavoidable under any alternative the BLM put

forward so the goal is to responsibly route the transmission line without unnecessarily increasing costs to ratepayers and minimizing disturbance to the conservation area.

H.R. 1728 strikes this balance by removing a corridor of roughly 2600 acres of the conservation area and converting it to BLM multiple use land for the right of way of the transmission line. This route was the preferred option of the BLM's Resource Advisory Committee and avoids key sage grouse habitat and private property rights.

In exchange, the conservation area is expanded by 4800 acres by converting BLM multiple use land into conservation area status. This area has been identified as high priority habitat for birds of prey. The legislation also directs Idaho Power to pay for reasonable mitigation under the framework of the final EIS released in October of 2016. Idaho Power will also fund improvements to the Conservation Lands System through the newly established BLM Foundation.

H.R. 1728 is a consensus plan that has received the support of the State of Idaho, The Conservation Lands Foundation, the Idaho Congressional Delegation, Idaho/Rocky Mountain Power, the Idaho Conservation League, The Wilderness Society, and The Nature Conservancy. I would especially like to thank Danielle from The Conservation Lands Foundation and Jeff Malmen from Idaho Power who were able to have pragmatic conversations which lead to a solution they could both agree to. I would also like to thank the BLM who helped craft this vision not only for this segment, but for the life of this ten year project which will be instrumental in meeting the needs of my constituents.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the time to testify today.