

Congressman Jared Huffman
Statement on H.R. 2250, Northwest California Wilderness,
Recreation, and Working Forests Act
Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing
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[894 words, ~5 min]

Thank you Chair Haaland for including my bill, H.R. 2250, the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act, in today's legislative hearing.

My district in Northwest California includes some of the most majestic landscapes and biodiverse ecosystems in California – it's home to the only major undammed river in California, the Smith; old growth forests like our ancient redwoods; and unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities like hiking, fishing, biking, paddling, and climbing.

Being active in the outdoors, experiencing wild places, and connecting to a healthy environment is the way of life for my constituents and is sought after by the many visitors to the second district. It is critical to take care of these places and to ensure a future for the communities who rely on them. That is exactly what my bill would do.

This bill, which reflects input from diverse stakeholders over three years of work, would protect important wild places on federal lands, restore forests and fish habitat, benefit local economies and wildlife, increase recreational opportunities and spur tourism, and protect communities by increasing fire resilience. There are a few provisions I'd like to specifically point out.

The bill designates a 730,000 acre restoration area in the South Fork Trinity River, Mad River, and North Fork Eel watersheds. Restoration will include an extensive network of shaded fuel breaks along roads, where fire ignitions are most likely to happen, and will improve the ecological health of forests through careful, individual tree removal, particularly in plantations that were replanted as homogeneous stands after clearcut logging. These collaboratively developed restoration activities will help promote fire resilience, protect communities, restore diverse forest ecosystems that are naturally adapted to fire, and create local jobs.

My bill would also establish a partnership of federal, state, and local entities to restore public lands and waters

damaged by illegal marijuana grow sites, which pose significant threats to public health, public safety and law enforcement, wildlife, and water quality. This is critical for my district, and I hope our work can serve as an example for other places across the state.

My bill is ambitious when it comes to recreation and conservation. It calls for an additional 295 miles of trails, with opportunities for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and off-highway vehicle use. The bill proposes new visitor centers and overnight lodging, to boost the rapidly growing outdoor recreation economy and its benefits for communities around these valuable public lands. In California, the outdoor economy drives \$92 billion in consumer spending, supports nearly 700,000 jobs, and results in \$6.2 billion in state and local tax revenue. In the second district alone, residents spend \$1.93 billion on outdoor recreation each year. It's clear that investing in our public lands now means a future where the environment and the economy both thrive.

The bill would also result in 261,000 acres of wilderness and 379 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers, designating areas that are critical habitat for endangered salmon and

steelhead and home to a variety of important native ecosystems and rare plants. The proposals would protect some of the largest intact old-growth oaks, conifers, and redwood forests in California. Finally, these areas include some of the best fishing, swimming, and whitewater runs in the state. Protecting these in perpetuity under the Wilderness Act and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act will ensure that future generations can experience the same wild places that we do and can benefit from the same resources we do, whether it's clean water, clean air, healthy wildlife, or recreation.

Lastly, I'd like to explain how this bill was developed. Over more than three years, I asked stakeholders what policy issues should be addressed by public lands legislation. This led to a draft that included issues raised by a diverse array of constituents. The draft bill was available on my website for public review and comment for over a year, and I held four public meetings in my district that were attended by over 500 people. This level of stakeholder participation means that we've focused on what people in Northwest California want to see with their public lands, and that is the bill under consideration today.

Much of the input we heard during this process resulted in changes to the draft bill, such as directing coordination of land management agencies' fire responses in wilderness areas, or authorizing agencies to partner with non-federal organizations to help maintain outdoor recreation infrastructure like trails, campgrounds, and visitor centers. I moved boundaries and removed entire wilderness and wild and scenic river proposals because of concerns from stakeholders and landowners, the timber industry, and Tribes.

This broad participation has led to equally broad support throughout the four counties that are impacted and that stand to benefit. Conservation organizations, outdoor recreation groups, and dozens of business and community leaders, local outfitters and guides, adjacent landowners, and former and current local elected officials in Trinity, Del Norte, Mendocino, and Humboldt Counties are in support of this bill, including one of our witnesses, my constituent and business owner Kent Collard, who is testifying today. Thank you for being here.

In closing, this is a comprehensive, carefully developed piece of legislation that is focused on a future for Northwest California where public lands are protected, the outdoor recreation economy grows, and where communities thrive. I look forward to further discussion on this bill today and thank you for the opportunity.