

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Markey
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing
July 26, 2011

Mr. Chairman, too often in politics, the justifications offered for a legislative proposal are not the real reasons behind the bill. This is part of what gives politicians a bad name – they spend too much time using arguments that don't hold water because they know that if they tell the public what they are really up to – the American people will not support them.

That is what is going on with H.R. 1581 today.

Most of the arguments you are going to hear – if you stop and actually consider them – are completely unpersuasive.

For example, we will hear that we need to release wilderness study areas and inventoried roadless areas that were not recommended for wilderness because Congress should be bound by recommendations made by the Executive Branch 20 or 30 years ago.

I ask you, does that really sound like something Congress should do?

Just as we don't base our health policy on 30-year-old science or our defense policy on 30-year-old-maps, we should not bind ourselves to agency recommendations based on field work done during the Reagan Administration.

What's more, the Republican Majority in this House has made attacking federal agencies and employees an art form. To come in now and say Congress needs to follow those bureaucrat's recommendations to the letter lacks credibility.

Most telling, however, is the fact that the legislation before us only follows agency recommendations to *release* wilderness study and roadless areas. Those recommendations were accompanied by recommendations to *designate* new wilderness but proponents of this bill think those suggestions aren't worth following.

The other arguments we will hear today are similarly suspect. The Wilderness Act already allows any action needed to fight fires or to protect public safety. We already have hundreds of thousands of

miles of roads criss-crossing our national forests, providing fully adequate recreational access. Hunting and fishing are already allowed in wilderness and wilderness study areas. Since enactment of the Wilderness Act, many of the fastest growing communities in the country have been those with large areas of beautiful, protected open space.

H.R. 1581 is not really about any of these things – that is why these claims fail to withstand even minimal scrutiny.

The truth is, this bill is no different from much of the legislation that has come from the Majority on this committee this year.

H.R. 1581 is simply a wealth transfer from the American people to the oil and gas, mining and timber industries. If you scratch the surface of this bill, you find drill-baby-drill.

The stunning vistas, open spaces, recreational opportunities, wildlife, clean air and clean water provided by these areas belongs to all Americans and this

bill would bundle it all up and transfer it to oil and gas and mining and timber companies to convert into corporate profits.

These areas were passed into our hands by our predecessors here in the Congress and H.R. 1581 is an abdication of our responsibilities and a failure of our stewardship.

H.R. 1581 should be defeated.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I object to the unfortunate decision to insist that Secretary Babbitt testify on the last panel today. No one in this room has a more distinguished career of public service on these issues or more expertise on these matters.

We do not know if this decision was based on some trepidation regarding the content of his written testimony or a desire to postpone an oral presentation that will lay bare the flaws in this bill. In either case, this lack of decorum is

**unfortunate and should not have
happened.**