



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

February 10, 2020
(House Rules)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 2546 – Protecting America’s Wilderness Act (Rep. DeGette, D-CO, and Rep. Neguse, D-CO)

The Administration opposes H.R. 2546. This bill would impose unnecessary and harmful restrictions on more than 2.5 million acres of land in Colorado, California, and Washington State, including nearly 1.5 million acres in the form of wilderness designations. These restrictions will greatly reduce opportunities for multiple uses on these public lands, limit access to them, and significantly reduce the available productive acreage in working forests, rendering them more prone to catastrophic wildfires.

The Administration has expanded access to America’s public lands; increased hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities nationwide; and enhanced conservation stewardship of our vast natural resources. With regard to the designation of wilderness on public lands, the Administration generally supports congressional action to resolve wilderness designation and Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) release issues, particularly for WSAs that were established more than 30 years ago. Many WSAs were recommended for designation, while others were recommended as not suitable, with suggestions that they be returned to agency management to integrate their other intrinsic values into surrounding land management plans. The Administration recommends addressing these long overdue WSA decisions before undertaking potential designations of new areas that did not meet the criteria established in the 1964 Wilderness Act when inventories were completed many years ago.

The Administration strongly believes that before new or potential wilderness areas or wild and scenic rivers are designated, it is important to first ensure that such designation is the most appropriate land management tool for a given parcel. For this and other reasons, successful conservation proposals that have incorporated this tool over the last decade have been more limited in geographic scope than this bill. It is important to ensure that designating new wilderness areas on public lands does not unnecessarily impede public access, limit outdoor recreational opportunities, or conflict with pre-existing uses. Unfortunately, a number of the proposals for wilderness designations in H.R. 2546 fail to follow this successful model.

While many recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, are compatible with wilderness designation, other activities, such as mountain biking and off-highway vehicle use, are not. Some of the areas proposed for wilderness designation in H.R. 2546 contain popular motorized or mechanized recreation areas. In addition, existing energy development poses inherent challenges for wilderness designations, creating complex management issues pertaining to active mining claims and oil and gas leases within a designated wilderness area. The

designations under this bill could impede future energy and mineral development, including development that is important to the economic and national security of the United States.

The Administration is committed to managing public lands as a good neighbor to the local communities and to the Americans who live and work in close proximity to them. Engaging local stakeholders and considering their on-the-ground expertise are critical steps in making decisions about public lands management, and local communities have concerns that many aspects of H.R. 2546 would produce negative effects for their citizens and their economies.

The Administration is willing to work with Congress to make the necessary improvements to this bill if it is considered further. If H.R. 2546 were presented to the President in its current form, however, his advisors would recommend that he veto it.

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