

**Statement of Frank R. Beum**  
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**U.S. Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture**  
**Before the**  
**House Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**  
**Concerning**

**H.R.2250 - Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding H.R. 2250, the “Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act.”

H.R. 2250 is a comprehensive bill that addresses restoration needs, recreation, and land conservation on federal lands in California. The bill accomplishes these goals through forest restoration activities, authorizing new partnerships for various activities, and requiring that fire management planning be incorporated into the land management plan revision process. The bill also adds or potentially modifies recreation trail systems, designates new wilderness areas, creates additions to existing wildernesses, and designates certain rivers in California as wild and scenic rivers.

The USDA understands the overarching intent of this legislation is to recognize the importance of wilderness areas, recreation, and wild and scenic rivers, but has a number of concerns. The agency would like to work with the Committee and sponsor of this bill to ensure that these proposals are crafted in a way that best supports the intent of this bill.

In this testimony, we address proposed designations on lands administered by the Forest Service. We defer to the Department of the Interior regarding the designations on the lands and interests administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

**Title I**

A number of sections in Title I would be challenging to reconcile and implement with the agency’s existing land management plans. For example, Section 101 includes a level of detail on management activities such as details on shaded fuel breaks, trail management, and special area designations, that would be better resolved through our planning process. Section 103 would establish the Northern California Public Lands Remediation Partnership for the purpose of providing for the remediation of the specified National Forest System lands and Bureau of Land Management lands in northern California affected by illegal marijuana cultivation or other illegal activities. Section 103 could be viewed as authorizing the Partnership, in place of the agencies, to carry out remediation on the federal lands, rather than functioning strictly as a collaborative entity.

Changing how the agency revises the land management plans for Shasta-Trinity, Six Rivers, Klamath, and Mendocino National Forests would also create challenges. For example, Section 106 would require the agency to include comprehensive fire management plans for the wilderness areas and wilderness additions established in Section 301, when revising the land management plans for the Shasta-Trinity, Six Rivers, Klamath, and Mendocino National Forests. The Forest Service does not use the land management plan revision process to conduct fire management planning. To avoid adding unnecessary complexity while still meeting the overall goals of the section, the agency recommends amending Section 106(a) to maintain the current practice of conducting comprehensive fire management planning separately from the land management plan revision process.

## **Title II**

The Forest Service supports creating trail systems that enhance connections to communities and welcomes working with the Committee, sponsor, local governments, and stakeholders to provide new recreation opportunities. The agency already has the authority to designate trails described in Sections 202 through 206. The authority in Section 207 is also duplicative because the agency already has the partnership authorities outlined in this provision.

## **Title III**

This title would establish new wilderness areas, as well as potential wilderness areas, expand existing wilderness areas and designate certain rivers in Northwest California as wild and scenic rivers. The agency has some technical concerns and clarifications that we would like to work with the Committee and the sponsor of this bill to address. My testimony pertains only to the designations proposed on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

USDA supports designation of wild and scenic rivers if they have been analyzed and designated as suitable through the land management planning process, which includes local engagement and public input. Of the 37 rivers proposed for wild and scenic river designation in the bill, 17 are in areas managed by the Forest Service. Of these, portions of five of these rivers (the North Fork Trinity River, South Fork Trinity River, Hayfork Creek, Canyon Creek, and Middle Eel River) were previously supported for designation through the agency's land management planning process. A portion of one additional river (Red Mountain Creek) was previously found eligible but a suitability study has not been completed.

In addition, we want to ensure that any new designations are properly integrated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with enough time to develop comprehensive river management plans and to establish detailed boundaries in cooperation with interested public stakeholders. The agency would like to highlight that the short completion timeframes identified under Section 3(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act are challenging to meet and suggest exemption from this requirement to ensure the river management plans for any new designations align with future scheduled revisions of land and resource management plans of the applicable national forests.

USDA supports designation of wilderness areas if they have been recommended for designation through the agency's land management planning process, which includes local engagement and public input. Title III includes additions to eight existing wildernesses, designates six new wilderness areas and six potential wilderness areas on NFS lands. These additions were not recommended for designation through the agency's land management planning process. Several proposed areas for "Potential Wilderness" designations have a variety of non-conforming uses or conditions affecting wilderness character, including previously-harvested areas as well as roads.

The Forest Service is committed to collaborating with Congress, Tribes and all members of the interested public during our land management planning process to identify and propose appropriate parcels of land or river segments within the National Forest System in California for designation as wilderness or wild and scenic rivers and to manage those parcels responsibly when designated. We look forward to working with the sponsors of this bill to address the concerns outlined above.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and I welcome any questions.