

**Statement of
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**Before the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives**

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H.R. 1853

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Department of Agriculture's views on H.R. 1853, a bill to clarify Federal jurisdiction with respect to the C.C. Cragin Project.

The C.C. Cragin Project consists of a dam, reservoir, and a number of facilities, including a diversion tunnel and pump shaft, pumping plant, priming reservoir, pipeline, electrical transmission line, and a generating plant. Most of the project is located in the Coconino and Tonto National Forests in north-central Arizona on a parcel of land encompassing approximately 512 acres and containing (1) approximately 300 feet of the crest of the Cragin Dam and associated spillway; (2) a reservoir pool of the Cragin Dam of approximately 250 acres, as defined by the high water mark; and (3) a linear corridor of approximately 262 acres.

H.R. 1853 seeks to address Federal jurisdiction with respect to the C.C. Cragin project by transferring jurisdiction over the Federal land underlying the dam, reservoir, and linear corridor from the US Forest Service to the Bureau of Reclamation.

As the Administration testified on S. 1080, the Administration appreciates the interest of the Salt River Project Agricultural Improvement and Power District (SRP) to reach prompt resolution of the management responsibilities of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior. The goals of the two federal agencies involved in managing this land, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, are twofold. First, we aim to clarify the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation's management responsibility for the lands underlying the dam and reservoir, acknowledging SRP's right to operate and maintain the dam, reservoir, and utility corridor pursuant to the Arizona Water Settlement Act (AWSA, Public Law 108-451) and the 1917 agreement between the Department of the Interior and SRP. Second, we must meet the needs of the Forest Service by allowing the agency to manage the lands underlying the utility corridor for recreation, wildfire, law enforcement, and other activities consistent with the Forest Service's authorities and responsibilities, the AWSA, the 1917 agreement, and the existing right-of-way over the corridor held by another party. In particular, this approach would allow for integrated management of tens of thousands of acres of ecosystems across National Forest System lands underlying and adjacent to the Cragin project, including watershed, wildlife habitat, range, and vegetation management.

The Administration recognizes that this legislation is intended to hasten the development of a workable management agreement. However, the Department has concerns with H.R. 1853 as it could complicate Forest Service management of the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands. While this particular legislation may work for this specific situation, it potentially sets a precedent for managing other utility corridors that could negatively impact land management activities. We also have been in discussions with staff from the Bureau of Reclamation as well as key stakeholders about potential non-legislative solutions to resolve these

difficult management issues. We will continue to engage in dialogue with these interested parties.

We understand this Committee is considering making amendments to H.R. 1853 so that it would be similar to S. 1080 as reported. Though S. 1080 as reported has some of the same issues as H.R. 1853, it would be less problematic for the Forest Service and we do not oppose it. We would like to continue to work with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Committee on the remaining technical clarifications that involve mapping, emergency activities, and access as well as other legislative options for achieving the same objectives. Thank you for your consideration.

STATEMENT

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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 16, 2010

CONCERNING:
H.R. 5965, Monongahela Conservation Legacy Act of 2010

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to provide the Department's view on H.R. 5965, the Monongahela Conservation Act of 2010. I am Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief for the National Forest System of the U.S. Forest Service.

Wilderness—those lands designated by Congress possessing truly special characteristics and beauty—is part of our uniquely American heritage. The responsibility of managing well over half of the Federal land units designated as wilderness is a duty the United States Forest Service takes very seriously. I am proud of that management role.

H.R. 5965 would designate one parcel, comprising approximately 6,042 acres, as an addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This parcel, referred to as North Fork Mountain, lies entirely within the Monongahela National Forest in the eastern part of West Virginia. This area is known for its rugged beauty and steep terrain. It is a place of rich biodiversity and home to many threatened or rare species, such as the timber rattlesnake, peregrine falcon and Eastern small footed bat. While we appreciate Mr. Mollohan's intent to preserve and protect this special land, we do have some concerns we would like to further discuss with the sponsor and committee.

Existing Conditions in Proposed Area

The proposed wilderness boundary would begin at the north end of the North Fork Mountain ridge and extend south to where the Grant and Pendleton County lines join across the mountain ridge.

This part of North Fork Mountain is currently managed as Management Prescription (MP) 8.1 Semi-primitive Non-motorized. That means as "8.1" it is part of the Congressionally-designated Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, but as "Semi-primitive Non-motorized" the management emphasis is for dispersed, non-motorized recreation in a semi-primitive setting. There are no private lands contained within the boundary of the subject area. No new roads are to be constructed and no programmed commercial harvest is allowed. Vegetation may be treated to enhance recreation or

wildlife habitat, address public safety, control insect or disease outbreaks, or to restore areas damaged by natural phenomena. There are no range allotments or livestock grazing permits in this area. The primary use is dispersed recreation in the form of hiking, backpacking, hunting, and other compatible non-motorized uses, including mountain biking.

There are two trails located in this area. One, TR 502, is a short 1.36 mile connector between the county road and the long-distance trail that traverses the entire length of North Fork Mountain. That trail, TR 501, is just over 23 miles in length and is a popular route. The proposed wilderness contains 7.23 miles of TR 501, or just under 1/3 of the entire trail length. Long distance trail use is somewhat complicated by the patches of private ownership along the southern portion of the trail, outside of the proposed wilderness area. Both trails allow mountain bike use, a form of mechanical transport which is prohibited in designated wilderness.

This entire portion of North Fork Mountain is within a larger, newly created Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area (CWPMA) through which numerous agency, state, and private partners are working to address an increasing problem with non-native invasive plants on both public and private lands. On the ground actions have begun in the CWPMA to begin to combat these species through a variety of means, including mechanical treatments, hand treatments, and/or herbicides. We would need to reevaluate our various treatment options under wilderness designation.

Evaluation for Wilderness As Part of the Forest Planning Process

The Record of Decision for the current Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan was signed in 2006. The North Fork Mountain area currently proposed under H.R. 5965 was evaluated as part of a larger 9,391 acre area referred to as the North Mountain/Hopeville area for roadless area attributes as part of the Forest planning process. The larger area was not considered at that time as meeting the Forest Service criteria for Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) status nor was it recommended for wilderness study.

Agency Evaluation Regarding Potential Wilderness Designation

Designation of the North Fork Mountain area as wilderness would not create an onerous management change to the Forest Service, as the area is already managed under stringent guidelines. The major impacts would be to the mountain biking community who would no longer be able to ride in the area. As mentioned earlier, the CWPMA would also need to be reevaluated.

Conclusion

In closing, while the Department is confident that current management of the area as part of the Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area is providing both excellent natural resource protection and recreation opportunities, the Department is not opposed to additional Congressional consideration of the wilderness potential for the North Fork Mountain area. We would like to discuss the concerns mentioned in this testimony in further detail with the sponsor and committee.

Thank you for your time today, I look forward to any questions you might have.