

Statement of Todd Harman

Co-owner and General Manager

Harman's North Fork Cottages, Cabins, WV

H.R. 5965 Monongahela Conservation Legacy Act

September 16, 2010

Chairman Grijalva and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to be here today. My name is Todd Harman, and I am the co-owner and General Manager of Harman's North Fork Cottages, in Grant County, West Virginia. On behalf of Harman's and other Grant County businesses, I am pleased to present to you my testimony in favor of H.R. 5965, the Monongahela Conservation Legacy Act.

My grandparents, Fred and Therma Harman, started Harman's in 1939, while living in cabin #1. His children Peggy, Nancy, Freddie and Penny Harman were born in the cabins. My wife Angelina and I were married at the cabins. Today, Fred's daughter, Penny, and grandchildren Fred Roby and I manage our luxury log cabin business.

We are a small, but successful, third-generation business, and we have suffered our fair share of ups and downs. We have experienced nearly total destruction from the flood of 1985, but we started rebuilding and have emerged as one of the most successful business in our area. Harman's depends on visitors who come to experience our area's unparalleled scenic beauty. I have been blessed enough to travel to some of the world's most recognized destinations, from Yellowstone and Alaska's rugged tundra to the German Alps. Every time I return home, I am in awe of the beauty of what God has created in the mountains of Grant County. Taking in the breathtaking view from the porches at Harman's, one can't help but understand that our creator had something special in mind for North Fork Mountain.

Harman's is located on the banks of the North Fork River, adjacent to the proposed North Fork Mountain Wilderness Area. For 71 years, guests have come to Harman's to enjoy many activities our area has to offer. Some of our visitors come for the trophy fly fishing, just steps away from their cabin doors. Others enjoy West Virginia's prime hunting grounds in the fall. Many of our guests come to explore nearby places such as Dolly Sods and Roaring Plains, storied destinations which are protected as congressionally designated Wilderness areas.

Because of their status as designated Wilderness, places like Dolly Sods, carry certain notoriety, and for good reason, businesses in Grant County tout our proximity to these Wilderness areas. Dolly Sods Wilderness is also the top area attraction highlighted by the Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

North Fork Mountain Wilderness, as proposed under H.R. 5965, would bring the same notoriety as Dolly Sods even closer to our local business community, by establishing the very first Wilderness area entirely in Grant County. Of course, the proposal to designate

a protected Wilderness area, literally in our back yard, makes economic sense.

Wilderness designation would give Grant County a new destination to highlight, to market to guests who wish to visit the area for a variety of activities. Some of North Fork Mountain's most prominent geological features are visible from Harman's and nearby points outside the wilderness boundary, allowing many to experience the proposed Wilderness area without crossing into its boundaries. Some of our guests may never step foot inside the Wilderness, but the proximity alone will present new opportunities for the businesses surrounding North Fork Mountain.

Harman's is certainly not the only local business to benefit from the proximity of such a resource, and that is evident in the support of this measure from Grant County's tourism business community. Support also comes from local businesses such as the North Fork Mountain Inn, Mountain River Retreat and North Mountain Vacation Rentals, adjacent to the proposed area, as well as Breath of Heaven Bed and Breakfast and Eagles Nest Outfitters, just miles away in nearby Petersburg.

Our local tourism-based business proprietors function as a tightly-knit community. We value the resources that bring visitors to our region, and we understand the importance of protecting them, so that we may continue to reap the benefits of increased tourism, and local entrepreneurs will have the same opportunities to capitalize on Grant County's natural beauty well into the future.

I especially appreciate Representative Mollohan's willingness to revise the boundaries of the original North Fork Mountain Wilderness proposal according to the concerns of outdoor recreationists and the U.S. Forest Service. The proposal wasn't always perfect, and there were some major concerns that were addressed en route to the final proposal which we support today.

As an owner and General Manager of Harman's North Fork Cottages, I was the source of some of that concern. Along with fellow trout fishermen, I saw potential threats to stocking operations, which provide trophy fishing opportunities in the North Fork River. Much of our business depends on our guests' immediate access to trophy fishing, and the opportunities for anglers at Harman's has often been featured in sporting media, most recently on nationally broadcast Fly Rod Chronicles hosted by Curtis Fleming. The thought of losing important stocking opportunities was troubling to say the least.

In the process of developing the current proposal, the concerns of the sporting community, managing agencies and other user groups were considered to determine reasonable boundaries. Without hesitation, 34 acres included in the original wilderness proposal were removed from consideration, and boundaries were adjusted to preserve access for trout stocking operations in the North Fork River. Once this revision was offered, I felt comfortable knowing that this special area would stand to gain deserved protections, while important access for our time-honored traditions of hunting and fishing would also be preserved.

This change was just one in a long line of revisions offered to gain consensus around HR 5965. The North Fork Mountain Wilderness area as originally proposed stood at nearly 9,200 acres. Now, we are considering a version reduced by nearly 1/3, in order to provide continued access for anglers and trout stocking operations, for the U.S. Forest Service's continued management, and especially for the mountain biking community.

Thanks to a reduction of over 3,000 acres, cyclists will continue to have access to the vast majority of trails on North Fork Mountain, as well as to a connecting side trail and a loop opportunity, which would have been closed under the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition's original proposal for the area. North Fork Mountain contains a vast trail system, and H.R. 5965 leaves incredible opportunities for mountain biking intact.

The area included in H.R. 5965 entirely avoids routes previously used for popular mountain bike races on North Fork Mountain, and current boundaries exclude the only rides touted by the Pendleton County Convention and Visitors Bureau. One of these rides, an out and back ride totaling 20 miles, would not have been affected, even under the original proposal. The second ride, a longer loop from the North Fork Trail to Smoke Hole Road, via Redman Run Trail, would have been eliminated under the original wilderness proposal, but is now preserved in its entirety under H.R. 5965.

The boundaries of the area were drawn to avoid several controversies often present in proposed Wilderness. The area contains no timbering operations or drilling sites, and there are no privately owned minerals underlying North Fork Mountain's surface. No access roads used by hunters will be included in the proposal, and the area contains no wildlife clearings maintained by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

In closing, I ask that you recognize the efforts to gain consensus in crafting this proposal and support H.R. 5965. With strong local business support following a good faith effort to reach a point of compromise with recreational groups and managing agencies, this measure represents what a wilderness proposal should look like.

I look forward to the day when I know the magnificent cliff lines visible from Harman's Cottages will be preserved in perpetuity, when I can rest assured that this special area will be preserved for future West Virginians, for Grant County's visitors and for our children - Spencer Harman, Christian Harman, Kelsie Roby and Freddie Roby - the fourth generation proprietors of Harman's North Fork Cottages.

Thank you,

Todd Harman
Harman's North Fork Cottages