

**Statement of The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, a  
Representative in Congress from the State of West Virginia**

**H.R. 5965, the Monongahela Conservation Legacy Act of 2010  
September 16, 2010**

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Subcommittee, for today's hearing to discuss, among other measures, H.R. 5965, the Monongahela Conservation Legacy Act of 2010. I am grateful for your consideration of this legislation, which would permanently protect one of West Virginia's most wild and wonderful places. I appreciate the testimony of the U.S. Forest Service and of Mr. Todd Harman, a third generation business owner in Grant County, West Virginia.

H.R. 5965 would add 6,042 acres of federally-owned land on North Fork Mountain in Grant County, West Virginia to the National Wilderness Preservation System. I introduced this bill after extensive conversations with West Virginia constituents who share a profound commitment to preserving our wild places not only for their ecological value, but also for their role in increasing recreational tourism.

West Virginia has no shortage of truly remarkable, natural places worthy of continued preservation. The state's eight existing wilderness areas have significantly aided our efforts to diversify the economy into recreation and tourism sectors. We've witnessed the result not only in the bottom line of our local businesses and in the ecological health of watersheds within wilderness areas, but also in our position on the national map as a place for generations of visitors to enjoy and treasure.

I have represented Grant County for the past 28 years in Congress. I know North Fork Mountain's spectacular qualities. However, the Forest Service, other agencies, and experts can attest to the significant ecological values of the proposed wilderness area.

North Fork Mountain is a richly concentrated area of biological diversity and it received the Forest Service's highest rating for Natural Integrity in its Wilderness Attribute Rating System. The area is a nesting site for the peregrine falcon, which is listed as a Species of Concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As a whole, the Mountain is home to 120 rare plants, animals, and natural communities, all of which would be protected and provided permanent relief from human impacts under the wilderness designation. H.R. 5965 would protect the ridgelines and ecological values of North Fork Mountain from the increased extraction-based uses of our public lands.

The legislation before this Subcommittee today incorporates a careful and thoughtful constituent proposal first put together by local residents and organizations in 2004. H.R. 5965 is supported by a range of small businesses in Grant County as well as the West Virginia Council on Churches, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition, and other organizations. Residents of Grant County and surrounding areas, including outdoorsmen and mountain bikers, have contacted me and the Grant County Commission in support of this bill.

As I mentioned, the citizen proposal to designate the North Fork Mountain Wilderness Area has been in existence for six years. Throughout this period, I have been in regular communication with the Forest Service to address any and all possible issues about the legislation being considered today. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Monongahela National Forest Supervisor Clyde N. Thompson and Kate Goodrich-Arling for the time, effort, and responsiveness extended by local agency staff.

I want to emphasize that in fashioning this legislation, I made a number of changes, in consultation with affected stakeholders, to minimize impacts for users of the Monongahela National Forest. In fact, I specifically selected the 6,042 acres in this bill because they do not contain active mineral leasing or wildlife openings operated by the state. Further, I adjusted the wilderness area boundary by 34 acres in order to alleviate sporting community and small business concerns about trout stocking in the North Fork River.

The most significant changes I made relate to mountain biking. I scaled back my bill by over 3,000 acres from the original citizen proposal, which was supported by several mountain biking businesses and diverse organizations, in order to address the concerns of mountain bikers. My legislation preserves the use of over 17 miles of the North Fork Mountain Trail while also leaving the entire Redman Run Trail open for bicycling. In making this adjustment, I took into consideration the Forest Service's ability to manage the wilderness as a cohesive and unified area. The removal of one-third of the proposed area reflects a strong commitment to address input provided by the mountain biking community while still permanently protecting over 6,000 acres as wilderness for all visitors of the Monongahela National Forest.

I should also point out that a number of recreational activities are permitted within wilderness areas, including hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, rock climbing and horseback riding, all of which would continue on North Fork Mountain.

Again, I appreciate the significant support and input that has been provided before and during this hearing and I will continue working with my constituents and local organizations as the legislative process moves forward. I look forward to the designation of the North Fork Mountain Wilderness Area

through enactment of this legislation and thank the Subcommittee again for today's hearing.