



**Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts
Regarding S. 583 and S.1240**

**Submitted to the
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining**

**For the Record of the
Hearing held on May 21, 2015**

The U.S. Public Lands program at The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to preserve ecologically and culturally diverse U.S. public lands through congressionally-designated wilderness, the establishment of national monuments, and administrative protections. We appreciate the opportunity to submit these views for the record.

S.583, Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act

The Pew Charitable Trusts supports S.583, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act (SNRA+), with qualifications.

Resources

The Boulder-White Cloud Mountain range and surrounding area in Central Idaho boasts some of the most rugged wild lands in our nation, encompassing a roadless core of 400,000 acres that provides critical habitat to numerous fish, plant, and wildlife species. The roadless nature of the land increases its ecological value, as habitat is not yet fragmented and biological diversity is abundant. The area also contains more than 150 mountains above 10,000 feet and contains the headwaters of the main Salmon River and the East Fork Salmon River, home to the highest elevation salmon and steelhead habitat in the contiguous United States.

The Boulder-White Clouds have a rich cultural history as well, as the gold rush and other mining booms brought miners to Idaho in droves in the 1800s, and relics of mines, mining structures, and settlements can be found in parts of the landscape. Native Americans have used the Boulder-White Clouds for thousands of years as a hunting ground. Spear points have been found in the region, as well as signs of ancient occupation such as rock shelters and fire hearths.

The region also boasts tremendous recreational opportunities for Idahoans and out-of-state visitors, providing an economic infusion to local communities. Hunting and fishing is world-famous here, as the lack of roads create large contiguous tracts of land that support big game such as elk, moose, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, black bear, and cougar. Despite these time-tested benefits of the wild lands in Central Idaho—lands already owned by the federal government—the Boulder-White Clouds are not permanently protected from development and other types of short-term exploitation.

Background

Pew's U.S. Public Lands Program has been working to protect the Boulder-White Clouds region in Central Idaho for over a decade. Our local partners in Idaho have worked for more than three decades to preserve the area. Since 2004, the legislation has seen nine iterations, multiple hearings in the House and Senate, House passage, and been a hair's breadth from enactment in 2006. It has been dormant in Congress since 2010 due to inability to reach consensus over boundaries and motorized recreation provisions in the bill.

Pew appreciates the commitments of Representative Mike Simpson and Senator Risch to revisit this matter and to reach a compromise among diverse stakeholders that would resolve public land management issues in this region for generations to come. The time is ripe to protect the Boulder-White Clouds this year.

Current Legislation

The current legislation proposed by Sen. Risch and Rep. Simpson addresses the needs of various constituencies that have engaged in the legislative process since 2004: counties and communities, ranchers, motorized recreationists, and conservationists.

S.583 would facilitate a number of public conveyances for several communities and Blaine and Custer Counties. It would authorize the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to permanently retire grazing permits that would be donated voluntarily by eligible ranchers. The legislation would provide certainty to motorized vehicle recreationists by legislatively guaranteeing that key trails would remain open, and it would designate 275,665 acres of wilderness in Central Idaho. The proposed wilderness acreage in S. 583 and the identical House bill is approximately 57,000 acres less than previous bill versions, a modification made in order to address the concerns of the motorized vehicle community. This significant decrease in land protection has been a difficult compromise for Pew and our partners, such as the Idaho Conservation League and The Wilderness Society.

Wilderness, defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964 as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain," continues to be the "gold standard" for federal land designation. Pew favors wilderness designation as the first priority for the Boulder-White Clouds region, and therefore supports S. 583. However, if it appears that Congress is unable to enact this legislation quickly we will continue to strongly advocate for a monument designation as the only remaining option for protecting this ecologically and culturally rich region.

S.1240, The Cerros del Norte Conservation Act

The Pew Charitable Trusts fully endorses S. 1240, applauds Senators Heinrich and Udall for championing the proposal, and looks forward to its early approval by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

The Cerros del Norte Conservation Act will designate two new wilderness areas, the Cerro del Yuta and Rio San Antonio, within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The proposed wilderness areas will comprise approximately 21,420 acres within the 242,500-acre National Monument northwest of Taos, New Mexico.

The 2013 National Monument designation was supported by New Mexico business owners, sportsmen, Tribal leaders, veterans and faith-based organizations, as well as local elected officials. Recently, the

Director of the Bureau of Land Management testified before the Senate that the monument designation has generated considerable economic stimulus to the northern New Mexico region. We believe the addition of these two areas as wilderness within the monument will serve to increase visitation and economic sustainability to the area.

Working closely with a broad and diverse local group of supporters over the past decade, Pew has been actively engaged in championing these proposed wildernesses. We were heartened when the President protected the Rio Grande del Norte region as a National Monument in 2013, and we are encouraged by the continued interest of Senators Udall and Heinrich in providing wilderness protection for Ute Mountain (Cerro del Yuta) and San Antonio Mountain (Rio San Antonio) within the monument. Wilderness designation for Cerro del Yuta and Rio San Antonio will serve to complete the local community's vision for the protection of these historic, culturally significant, scenic, and ecologically valuable public lands.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to submit these views for the committee's consideration. For additional information, please contact Marcia Argust, Project Director, The Pew Charitable Trusts, at 202-329-0793 or margust@pewtrusts.org.