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Statement of John Gilroy
Director, U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation, The Pew Charitable Trusts
Regarding S. 1765, S. 2828, S. 2890, S. 3241, and S. 3670
For the record of the legislative hearing held on September 16, 2020
In the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining

The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to preserve ecologically and culturally diverse U.S. public lands and rivers through federal and state administrative protections, legislative designations, and restoring America's National Parks System. To accomplish these goals, we work closely with conservation groups, recreation organizations, local businesses, local governments, and other stakeholders to develop collaborative proposals for public lands protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored how much Americans value their public lands, with many areas seeing more visitation than ever before. It has also created a need for durable economic recovery vehicles in rural areas; outdoor recreation on protected public lands can be one of the primary drivers of rural job creation and economic recovery. Each of these bills would create new opportunities that will support struggling small businesses as they work to survive during this challenging time.

Pew supports S. 1765, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act. S. 1765 is the result of more than a decade of on-the-ground collaboration among a wide variety of stakeholders, including timber companies, ranchers, small businesses, outfitters, hunters, anglers, recreation enthusiasts, and conservationists. The bill will protect ecologically sensitive areas as wilderness, expand opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, promote forest and habitat restoration, and boost the number of local timber jobs.

S. 1765 would add 79,060 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountain wilderness areas, securing vital habitat for elk, deer, grizzly bears, bull trout, and other sensitive species. This region, adjacent to the iconic Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, is frequented by hikers, campers, cross-country skiers, hunters, and anglers. The bill's proposed Otatsy Recreation Management Area will open 2,013 acres of public land to high-quality snowmobiling near Ovando and preserve prized mountain bike access to Spread Mountain, Center Ridge and Camp Pass.

Pew supports S. 2828, the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act. S. 2828 is the result of decades of discussion and months of intense collaboration that brought together sportsmen and women, ranchers, tribal nations, county representatives, conservationists, business leaders, and others to share perspectives on how to improve the long-term ecological health of public lands in Malheur County. The process was guided by three clear objectives: to support rural communities and economies, protect the wildest and most special places in Malheur County, and to do so without undermining bedrock conservation laws.

The Malheur Community Empowerment for Owyhee Act (S.2828) provides Malheur County with vital economic development opportunities that support local economies and communities, while safeguarding the Owyhee Canyonlands and surrounding lands for recreation and wildlife habitat for current and future generations. This bill designates more than 1.1 million acres of public lands as wilderness and more than 14 miles of Wild and Scenic.

We remain committed to working with this Committee and the bill's sponsors on this vital legislation to ensure that S.2828 achieves its promise for public lands in Malheur County and the shared objectives for the Owyhee and the people and enterprises that depend on the Canyonlands.

Pew supports S. 2890, the Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act. If enacted, S. 2890 will protect as Wilderness the approximately 12,392 acres of the wild Burbank Canyons. The largest remaining undeveloped area in Douglas County's Pine Nut Mountains, the perennial streams and aspen groves of the Burbank Canyons are home to raptors, mule deer, bear, mountain lion, sage grouse, and other critical bird species; the Canyons also provide visitors with excellent opportunities for hiking and wilderness quality experiences.

S. 2890 was developed with the cooperation of wilderness advocates in Nevada, the unanimous support of the Douglas County Commission, and the Washoe Tribe Council. In addition to protecting the Burbank Canyons, S. 2890 provides for the economic development and public safety needs of the County and conveys lands into trust for the Washoe Tribe.

As the Committee considers the request of the United States Navy for an expansion of Naval Air Station Fallon, and the subsequent mitigation that will be necessary if such an expansion were to be allowed, we urge the Committee to ensure that as a condition of that expansion, S. 2890 as well as related legislation including S. 3465, the Lander County Land Management and Conservation Act, S. 2804, the Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act, and S. 258, the Ruby Mountains Protection Act (reported by the Committee in December) are also enacted. We also urge the Committee to consider and address the needs of Churchill County, Nevada, as well as the needs identified by the Walker River Paiute and Fallon Shoshone Paiute Tribes as part of any reauthorization and expansion of NAS Fallon.

Pew supports S. 3241, a bill to amend the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act to establish the Cerro de la Olla Wilderness in the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, New Mexico.

The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument is already home to two wilderness areas, which were designated in the 2019 John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (S. 47). S. 3241 would build on this effort by designating the 13,013-acre Cerro de la Olla Wilderness area. Cerro de la Olla has been important to nearby communities for centuries, as people living in the area have gathered herbs and firewood there to sustain a traditional way of life. It is also popular today as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts, including hunters and hikers. A federal Wilderness designation would permanently protect this special place, allowing these traditional uses and outdoor recreation to continue in one of the most remote parts of northern New Mexico. The effort to protect the Cerro de la Olla as wilderness is supported by sportsmen, community members in the Taos area, small businesses, faith leaders, Taos Pueblo, and conservation groups.

Pew supports S. 3670, the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act. S. 3750

is comprehensive, balanced legislation that takes into consideration multiple interests and views of those who live, work, or visit the greater Gila region. The bill would permanently protect the Gila River, San Francisco River, and their main tributaries in the Gila National Forest and certain nearby lands critical for watershed protection. Adding these rivers to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System will protect the Gila's natural flows, which support outstanding examples of southwest riparian forest; some of the greatest non-coastal breeding bird diversity and density in the United States; and a nearly intact native fish community that includes the endangered loach minnow and spike dace, and the threatened Gila trout.

A study conducted this year by Southwick Associates estimated that \$3.1 billion is spent on outdoor recreation in the combined river region. This spending stimulates economic activity that directly supports at least 28,504 jobs in New Mexico that provide \$661.4 million in income. The spending is associated with \$1.0 billion of value-added to the economy along with \$165.1 million in state and local tax revenues. Including the multiplier effect of the initial spending, outdoor recreation activity in the region supports nearly 38,000 jobs and \$1.0 billion of income, provides \$1.8 billion of value added and generates \$250.8 million in state and local tax revenues. Tourism is New Mexico's second largest industry, and according to the New Mexico Tourism Department, over half of all overnight visitors to the state engage in outdoor activities. Towns like Silver City, the first Gateway Community to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, rely on protected lands and rivers to draw visitors and businesses alike. Additional protections for public lands and rivers in the region, and the media and traveler attention they attract, will further assist their efforts to promote the region as a destination for travelers.

This effort to conserve the Gila and San Francisco Rivers enjoys the support of a diverse assembly of interests, including private landowners, over 150 local businesses, and many thousands of New Mexican citizens. The breadth of support for this legislation reflects the comprehensive outreach and collaborative approach that the bill's sponsors have taken in

developing it. The nearby towns of Silver City, Bayard, and Hurley have all passed unanimous resolutions in support of the bill. The Grant County Commission – the primary county affected by the bill -- passed a similar resolution in September 2019. The Fort Sill Apache Tribe, and the All Pueblo Council of Governors, which represents all twenty Native American Pueblos in the State of New Mexico support these protections. We appreciate the Senators' continued leadership and their commitment to protecting the critical recreational, ecological, historic and economic values of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, and look forward to working with them and with the committee to improve and advance this legislation.

Contact

Pew appreciates the opportunity to submit these views for the Subcommittee's consideration, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to improve these bills. Please contact John Seebach at 202-540-6509 or jseebach@pewtrusts.org or Nicole Cordan at 503-703-3733 or rcordan@pewtrusts.org if you have any questions regarding our views on this legislation.