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**Written Statement Submitted by The Pew Charitable Trusts to the  
Senate Energy and Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining**

**For the record of the legislative hearing held on June 16, 2021  
Regarding S. 173, S. 177, S. 182, S. 455, S. 567, S. 609, and S. 1686**

The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to preserve ecologically and culturally significant U.S. public lands and rivers through legislative designations, as well as federal and state administrative protections. To accomplish these goals, we work closely with diverse stakeholders—such as local businesses, local governments, Indigenous Tribes, the outdoor recreation industry, travel and tourism organizations, veterans, sportsmen and women— to develop collaborative proposals that protect landscapes and local communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored how much Americans value the outdoors, with individuals actively seeking connections to public lands and rivers. It has also shown how important visitor spending is to states and local communities. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation activities generate \$788 billion each year in national economic output and support 5.2 million American jobs (2019 data). Our public lands and rivers are important economic drivers in rural and urban areas, and bills pending before the Subcommittee have the potential to assist in our nation’s economic recovery.

Pew supports S. 173, S. 177, S. 182, S. 455, S. 567, and S. 609. Pew opposes S. 1686. We appreciate the Subcommittee holding a hearing on these initiatives. Our detailed position on each proposal is outlined below.

**The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act (S. 173)**. This bill would protect 400,000 acres of public land in Colorado through new wilderness designations in places like Mount Sneffels and Hoosier Ridge, mineral withdrawals in the Thompson Divide, and the preservation of recreation and conservation management areas in places like Tenmile Range that provide opportunities for hiking and mountain biking.

S. 173 would also preserve important wildlife conservation areas like the Porcupine Gulch Wildlife Conservation Area, which includes Colorado's only migration corridor over Interstate 70 for elk, bear, mule deer, and other wildlife. In addition, the bill would honor the military legacy of the state and the U.S. Army's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division through the designation of the Camp Hale National Historic Landscape.

S. 173 combines and improves upon four previously introduced bills: the *Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act*, the *San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act*, the *Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act*, and the *Curecanti National Recreation Area Boundary Establishment Act*. The current legislation reflects years of coordination with hikers, campers, ranchers, sportsmen, elected officials, recreation groups, counties, and local business and energy companies. These individuals and groups came together to achieve consensus on appropriate protections for the region, and a program to support local communities through leasing and energy generation of excess methane from existing and abandoned coal mines in the North Fork Valley.

**Pew supports the Cerro de la Olla Wilderness Establishment Act (S. 177).** This legislation would designate a 13,103-acre Cerro de la Olla Wilderness area, building on existing protections within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The Cerro de la Olla has been important to nearby communities for centuries, as residents gather herbs and firewood to sustain a traditional way of life. It has also become a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts, including hunters and hikers. Wilderness designation would protect this area and traditional uses for generations to come, and the effort is supported by sportsmen, community members in the Taos area, small businesses, faith leaders, Taos Pueblo, and conservation groups.

**Pew Supports the Pecos Watershed Protection Act (S. 182).** S.182 would protect clean drinking water for communities in both New Mexico and Texas by withdrawing 150,000 acres of the Pecos River Watershed from mineral extraction, including oil and gas, gold, silver, copper, and other hard rock minerals.

The Pecos River Watershed extends from the north-central Sangre de Cristo Mountains and continues south and east before reaching the New Mexico-Texas state line at an elevation of approximately 3,000 feet. These waters are among New Mexico's most outstanding aquatic resources for people, plants, and animals alike. For centuries, the watershed has supported thriving ecosystems and communities. The Upper Pecos has sustained the Pecos Pueblo peoples for generations and continues to be culturally and materially significant to their communities. The Upper Pecos also sustains rich traditions of farming and ranching and other traditional uses, all of which depend on clean water.

In the 1990s, toxic waste spills and irresponsible mining activities caused severe contamination of the area, requiring remediation that took decades and required millions of dollars. S.182 would help prevent a repeat of contamination, safeguarding these waters for future generations.

**Pew supports the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (S. 455).** This bill would permanently conserve 126,661 acres as wilderness and add 19 rivers to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Specifically, the measure would: protect sources of clean drinking water and critical salmon and steelhead habitat; preserve and expand access and opportunities for world-class hiking, camping, boating, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation; create new economic opportunities for the Olympic peninsula while protecting existing timber jobs.

This carefully balanced, community-driven compromise legislation is the result of a multi-year public process featuring extensive local input, including feedback from the timber industry and timber communities and hundreds of meetings with stakeholders in every community on the Peninsula. The final proposal would permanently protect the best of the Olympic Peninsula's spectacular public lands and preserve timber jobs and recreational access. As a result, S. 455 enjoys broad and enthusiastic public support, with endorsements by more than 800 Olympic Peninsula & Hood Canal region businesses, Tribes, CEOs, farms, conservation & recreation organizations, local elected officials, and religious and community leaders. The bill is strongly supported by some of the Peninsula's largest employers, including Taylor Shellfish Farms, Sequim Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Ocean Gold Seafoods, and others who depend on this area to attract and retain residents and to and to grow the local economy. The bill has also been endorsed by more than 75 local & regional outdoor recreation businesses and organizations.

**Pew supports the Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 567).**

This bill – the largest conservation bill in Nevada's history – would safeguard critical wildlife habitat and cultural sites in Southern Nevada. It would do the following: permanently protect 1.3 million acres of wilderness within the Desert National Wildlife Refuge; designate 330,000 acres of other wilderness areas in Clark County; set aside 350,000 acres of Special Management Areas to protect, conserve, and enhance that habitat of at-risk species, including the Mojave Desert tortoise; and expand the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Each of these designations would help to ensure that the region's rapidly growing population will continue to have access to the outdoors. Outdoor recreation is critical to Nevadans' livelihoods, contributing more than \$5 billion to the state's economy in 2019, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

While achieving these substantial conservation gains, the bill would encourage sustainable economic development by allowing Clark County to use funds from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act account, established in 1998, for climate change initiatives and sustainable growth. This provision ensures that any new development would balance land conservation and climate sustainability projects. The bill also makes a real investment in affordable housing, a critical need in the Las Vegas metropolitan area.

**Pew supports the Ruby Mountains Protection Act (S. 609).**

This bill would protect Nevada's iconic Ruby Mountains and the Ruby Lakes National Wildlife Refuge by permanently withdrawing portions of the landscape from oil and gas exploration.

Pew strongly supports the conservation measures outlined in this bill. The Ruby Mountains are an iconic wildlife corridor, a world class recreation designation, and sacred to the constituent Bands of the Te-Moak Tribe.

The mule deer herd that migrates through the Ruby Mountains is one of the largest in Nevada, accounting for roughly 20 percent of mule deer statewide, and it exhibits long distance migration patterns that sometimes exceed 120 miles from its summer to winter range. Several key migration stopovers for this population occur at places within areas proposed for protections under S.609, including Harrison Pass Road on both sides of Toyn Creek, and the west side of Pearl Peak and Sherman Mountain.

Pew strongly supports the protections for this iconic wildlife corridor, and we look forward to working with this committee and the bill's sponsor to strengthen those protections. In particular, expanding the withdrawal footprint to include lands managed by the BLM at the southwest end of the Ruby Mountains offers an opportunity to better conserve the Area 10 population by protecting a critical section of this migration corridor from future disturbance.

**Pew opposes the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act (S. 1686).** By amending the Wilderness Act to allow the use of mechanized vehicles, such as bicycles, S. 1686 would permanently weaken statutory protections for all wilderness areas designated by Congress since 1964. Pew strongly opposes this legislation.

More than half a century after its passage, the Wilderness Act is considered the “gold standard” of public lands protection. The National Wilderness Preservation System includes some of the most remote, ecologically important, and undisturbed landscapes in the United States. Because Congress intended for wilderness protection to preserve these landscapes in a primitive, unspoiled state, motor vehicles and most other forms of mechanical transport are not allowed in Wilderness areas. These prohibitions include bicycles, wheeled cargo carriers, and other non-motorized forms of mechanical transportation.

Wilderness proposals are typically developed over years of collaboration with local stakeholders and their Members of Congress. Recreational users, including the mountain biking community, are often active participants in these efforts. Congress has a broad spectrum of tools that it can use to protect public lands. While mechanized activities are not permitted in designated wilderness areas, other protective designations, such as National Parks, National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, National Recreation Areas, and Wildlife Refuges provide ample opportunities for mechanized recreational activities. In cases where an existing wilderness designation conflicts with stakeholders' desired management objectives, a better approach may be an adjustment of the wilderness boundary, such as the one proposed in the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act (S. 1222), which is also being considered by this committee.

While Pew opposes S. 1686, we welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and with members of the mechanized recreation user community to address their specific concerns about access to public lands in ways that will not undermine the integrity of the Wilderness Act.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for the Subcommittee's consideration of Pew's views on these bills. We welcome the opportunity to work together to improve and move them forward.

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