

**Written Statement Submitted by The Pew Charitable Trusts to the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**

For the record of the legislative hearing held on November 9, 2021

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 local businesses, local governments, Indigenous communities, the outdoor recreation industry, travel and tourism organizations, veterans, sportsmen and women, and others 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 H.R. 980, H.R. 1469, H.R. 4358, and H.R. 4404. We appreciate the Subcommittee holding a hearing on these initiatives. Our position on each proposal is outlined below.

Pew Supports the Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021 (H.R. 980). This measure would permanently withdraw more than 100,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land in southwestern Oregon from mining activity. Located near the headwaters of several Wild and Scenic rivers and the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area, the withdrawal would protect more than 140 miles of pristine Southwest Oregon rivers.

Oregon's rivers and ancient forests showcase the rugged character of the state and offer ecological richness that is almost unparalleled in the continental United States. H.R. 980 will ensure access to clean drinking water for thousands of Oregonians in both rural and urban communities, help Oregon's extraordinary wild salmon populations to survive and flourish, and generate economic benefits from outdoor recreation activities.

Pew Supports the York River Wild and Scenic River Act of 2021 (H.R. 1469). This bipartisan legislation would designate approximately 30 miles of the York River and tributaries in the York River Watershed as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. The York River watershed sustains a rich tapestry of natural areas, fish and wildlife habitat, drinking water supplies, and numerous archaeological sites. The rivers in this region provide quality habitat for one of the largest smelt spawning migrations in southern Maine and support an active commercial fishing industry that's important to the area's economy and history. S. 491

was developed by the York River Study Committee, a diverse group of local stakeholders that explored river designation for over three years.

Pew Supports the Little Manatee Wild and Scenic River Act (H.R. 4358). The Little Manatee River is recognized by the State of Florida as an “Outstanding Florida Water” and is one of the most pristine blackwater rivers in the state. It is a haven for recreational activities, including canoeing, kayaking, boating, and fishing, and encompasses important seasonal habitat for the threatened Florida manatee. Supported by members of the Hillsborough and Manatee County Commissions, this bipartisan legislation would protect an approximately 51 mile long segment of the river, beginning at its source in southeastern Hillsborough County and flowing downstream to where the river enters Tampa Bay.

Pew Supports the Kissimmee River Wild and Scenic River Act (H.R. 4404). This bipartisan legislation would designate segments of the Kissimmee River in Florida as Wild and Scenic. H.R. 4404 would protect the source of the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee and the heart of water supplies for central Florida. In the 1940’s, the Kissimmee River was the subject of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers efforts to alter the river’s flow and channel, which subsequently destroyed tens of thousands of acres of wetlands and contributed to substantial phosphate pollution. After decades of restoration efforts beginning in the 1990’s, at the cost of more than \$1 billion, more than 63,000 acres of wetlands has been restored within the watershed for fish, wildlife, and flora. H.R. 4404 would protect that investment by including the river in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Conclusion

Thank you for the Subcommittee’s consideration of Pew’s views. We look forward to working together to improve these bills and move them forward. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Jim Bradley at jbradley@pewtrusts.org or Geoff Brown, gbrown@pewtrusts.org.