

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting Proposed Legislation on Idaho Public Lands Wilderness Designation September 4, 1992

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

I am pleased to submit for congressional consideration and passage the "Idaho Public Lands Wilderness Act".

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), (43 U.S.C. 1701, *et seq.*), directs the Secretary of the Interior to review the wilderness potential of the public lands.

The review of the areas identified in Idaho began immediately after the enactment of FLPMA and has now been completed. Approximately 1.8 million acres of public lands in 67 areas in Idaho met the minimum wilderness criteria and were designated as wilderness study areas (WSAs). These WSAs were studied and analyzed during the review process and the results documented in 14 environmental impact statements and three instant study area reports.

Based on the studies and reviews of the WSAs, the Secretary of the Interior is recommending that all or part of 27 of the WSAs, totaling 972,239 acres of public lands, be designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

I concur with the Secretary of the Interior's recommendations and am pleased to recommend designation of the 27 areas (totaling 972,239 acres) identified in the enclosed draft legislation as additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The proposed additions represent the diversity of wilderness values in the State of Idaho. These range from the high desert canyon lands of southwestern Idaho to the lava flows of the Great Rift and Hells Half Acre. These areas span a wide variety of Idaho landforms, ecosystems, and other natural systems and features. Their inclusion in the wilderness system will improve the geographic distribution of wilderness areas in Idaho, and will complement existing areas of congressionally designated wilderness. They will provide new and outstanding opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation.

The enclosed draft legislation provides

that designation as wilderness shall not constitute a reservation of water or water rights for wilderness purposes. This is consistent with the fact that the Congress did not establish a Federal reserved water right for wilderness purposes. The Administration has established the policy that, where it is necessary to obtain water rights for wilderness purposes in a specific wilderness area, water rights would be sought from the State by filing under State water laws. Furthermore, it is the policy of the Administration that the designation of wilderness areas should not interfere with the use of water rights, State water administration, or the use of a State's interstate water allocation.

The draft legislation also provides for access to wilderness areas by Indian people for traditional cultural and religious purposes. Access by the general public may be limited in order to protect the privacy of religious cultural activities taking place in specific wilderness areas. In addition, to the fullest extent practicable, the Department of the Interior will coordinate with the Department of Defense to minimize the impact of any overflights during these religious cultural activities.

I further concur with the Secretary of the Interior that all or part of 57 of the WSAs encompassing 825,217 acres are not suitable for preservation as wilderness.

Also enclosed are a letter and report from the Secretary of the Interior concerning the WSAs discussed above and a section-by-section analysis of the draft legislation. I urge the Congress to act expeditiously and favorably on the proposed legislation so that the natural resources of these WSAs in Idaho may be protected and preserved.

Sincerely,

GEORGE BUSH

Note: Identical letters were sent to Thomas S. Foley, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Dan Quayle, President of the Senate.