

Robert Bonnie
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Submitted via email to: Robert.Bonnie@usda.gov

RE: Recommendation for Conserving Our Nation's Lands and Waters

Dear Deputy Chief of Staff Bonnie,

I am writing today to address Section 216 of Executive Order 14008 – Conserving Our Nation's Lands and Waters. This section requires that the Secretary submit a report making recommendations for an agricultural and forestry climate strategy.

I recommend that the Secretary consider identifying and further protecting National Forest System lands that clearly contribute to the goal of conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. These lands could be administered and managed similar to the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System as established by Public Law 111-11. The role of special designated areas will only continue to grow in value and prominence as the country struggles to deal with climate change, habitat resilience, restoration efforts, and ever-increasing recreation demands on the National Forests.

I recommend that the Forest Service immediately organize to reflect a cohesive and interdisciplinary management approach to managing designated areas, while also seeking permanent legislation that would ensure long-term management of these areas as a conservation system. The administration could also immediately support legislation for a National Forest Landscape Conservation System by recommending an amendment to H.R. 803 (Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act) of the 117th Congress when the legislation is considered in the Senate.

The purpose of the new Title to be added to H.R. 803 would be to codify National Forest Landscape Conservation System areas. The amendment would establish a National Landscape Conservation System on National Forest System lands that would be managed by the USDA Forest Service as an integrated system of protected areas. The H.R. 803 amendment could be stated as follows:

TITLE XXVI -- NATIONAL FOREST LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM

SECTION 2601. SHORT TITLE. This title may be cited as the "National Forest Landscape Conservation System Act of 2021".

SEC. 2602. DEFINITIONS. In this title:

(a) Secretary.-- The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(b) System.-- The term "system" means the National Forest Landscape Conservation System established by section 2603(a).

SEC. 2603. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL FOREST LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM.

(a) Establishment.-- In order to conserve, protect, and restore nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding recreation, cultural, ecological, and scientific qualities and values for the benefit of current and future generations, there is established in the Forest Service the National Forest Landscape Conservation System.

(b) Components.-- The system shall include each of the following areas designated by Congress or the Secretary and administered by the USDA Forest Service:

(1) Each area that is designated by Congress as a --

- (A) National Heritage Area;
- (B) National Historic Landscape;
- (C) National Historic Trail;
- (D) National Monument;
- (E) National Recreation Area;
- (F) National Scenic Area;
- (G) National Scenic Trail;
- (H) Wild and Scenic River;
- (I) Wilderness Area;
- (J) Wilderness Study Area; or
- (K) Any additional area designated by Congress for inclusion in the system.

(2) Any administratively designated area as established by the Secretary that is managed for preservation or protection purposes, including --

- (A) Inventoried Roadless Area/Roadless Area;
- (B) National Grassland;
- (C) National Historic Landmark;
- (D) National Natural Landmark;
- (E) Research Natural Area;
- (F) Botanical Area, Critical Habitat, Geological Area, Historical Area, Paleontological Area, Recreational Area, Scenic Area, or Zoological Area; and
- (G) Other similar natural or historic area.

(c) Management.-- The Secretary shall manage the system—

(1) In accordance with any applicable law (including regulations) relating to any component of the system included under subsection (b);

(2) In a manner that protects the qualities and values for which the components of the system were designated; and

(3) In a manner that protects corridors associated with National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails to the degrees necessary to ensure that the qualities and values for which each trail was established remain intact.

(d) Effect.-- Nothing in this subtitle enhances, diminishes, or modifies any law or proclamation under which the components of the system described in subsection (b) were established.

SEC. 2604. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this Title that establishes the National Forest Landscape Conservation System.

Thank you for considering this legislative and administrative proposal to provide for an integrated system of protected areas on National Forest System lands. This proposal would lead to recognition and further protection of lands that contribute to conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

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