

ORAL TESTIMONY ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND FEDERAL LANDS PROTECTION ACT

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Mr. Bishop and members of the committee: thank you very much for granting me the honor and opportunity to testify regarding this pending legislation, the "National Security and Federal Lands Protection Act" H.R. 1505. I am proud to be a member of the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers (NAFBPO) and speak on its behalf.

We members of NAFBPO, though now retired, represent a rich and unique source of vast experience concerning border security issues including illegal immigration. We are free to speak our minds, beholden to no one, and we have no agenda beyond the national interest.

We firmly believe that the concept and purpose of this bill is one which will truly render both long-run and immediate benefits to our nation. While all civic minded citizens appreciate and enjoy the wonders, gifts and bounties of nature, logic and realism dictate that we must also view the world around us in all its complexities and demands, including that of our own national and individual security.

The preservation of certain natural areas is indeed a commendable goal, and one worthy of governmental concern. But that goal pales and must take a back seat when the natural areas in question happen to be along or quite close to our nation's external boundaries. For decades, our nation has spent vast treasures to provide for our own national security. Unfortunately, our current national policies regarding adequate border control and those others aimed at preserving natural areas adjacent to our borders have resulted in a clear conflict of goals and interests. The sad result has been that neither the land management nor the border security agencies have been able to accomplish their tasks in these locales. Preventing the U.S. Border Patrol from having full routine access to wilderness designated areas has literally provided unguarded and remote free passageways across our borders for smugglers of humans as well as all kinds of items, some of them with potentially catastrophic results for our nation.

The Border Patrol has taken steps to limit the impact of enforcement operations in sensitive lands, and Agents have received training in this regard. Those Agents are

widely recognized as good stewards of the environment by field personnel of land management agencies. Unfortunately, wilderness designated areas in which the Border Patrol is not allowed free access have in places been practically destroyed by smugglers and the waves of illegal border crossers who couldn't care less about the preservation of natural areas nor the mission of the U.S. land management agencies. Thus, both the border security and land management goals are defeated.

Sadly, today we have a history of federal agencies at odds with each other because of the conflicting mandates of border security versus natural area preservation.

Ironically, just a few days ago, on June 28, the White House issued a policy statement titled "National Strategy for Counterterrorism" which states in part that "Offensive efforts to protect the Homeland have been complemented by equally robust defensive efforts to prevent terrorists from entering the United States" and that "we have made massive investments in our aviation, maritime, and border-security capabilities to make the United States a hardened and increasingly difficult target for terrorists to penetrate. These efforts must continue."

It is readily apparent that whoever crafted that policy statement had no idea about the absurd situation where wilderness designated areas prevent unrestricted border security activities by a law enforcement agency of the government. The present conflict of goals, border security versus border area natural preservation, is untenable and cannot be allowed to continue. NAFBPO applauds the aims of this pending legislation because it correctly prioritizes our national goals and best interests, and we urge the members of this committee to strive until H.R. 1505 becomes the law of the land.

Again, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak on NAFBPO's behalf.