

Cubin criticizes bill to recognize wilderness study areas

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JACKSON (AP) -- Rep. Barbara Cubin is criticizing legislation to formally recognize wilderness study areas and other specially designated public lands across the West.

Cubin spokeswoman Rachael Seidenschur said Cubin believes the bill is too vague when it discusses protecting "values," possibly permitting land managers a wide range of interpretation.

The National Landscape Conservation System Act would make permanent the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's National Landscape Conservation System, made up of national monuments, conservation areas, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, and national scenic and historic trails on BLM land.

The bill passed the House 278-140 Wednesday. Cubin, R-Wyo., was among those voting no.

In Wyoming, the bill would apply to 42 wilderness study areas and five historic or scenic trails, including the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Last year, NLCS Director Elena Daly told Congress that the act would "assure that these landscapes of the American spirit would be conserved, protected and restored for the benefit of current and future generations." The Bush administration has indicated support for the bill.

Cubin, however, opposed the bill because it contained no definition of "values."

"This stark omission allows federal land managers to interpret current law rather than basing decisions on sound science," Cubin said in a press release. "It also gives an additional tool to any environmental trial lawyers unhappy with current land-management decisions in the West."

The bill next heads to the Senate.