

'The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act': Bill would close 24 million acres of land in Wyoming, four other states

Modified: Friday, May 8th, 2009

Editors note: The following appeared on the front page of the Friday, May 8 Uinta County Herald. However, the majority of the story should have continued inside the newspaper and it did not. The Herald is sorry for this error. The story in its entirety appears here.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — County government representatives from Sublette, Lincoln and Uinta counties are adamantly opposed to congressional action that would result in passage of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act.

County representatives meeting last week noted that with the majority of lands in western Wyoming already falling under federal agency control, what happens on those lands has major impact to local economies.

The bill proposes to close more than 24 million acres from access to grazing, timber, recreation and mining. Wyoming and four western states would be affected.

The bill was introduced by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY).

"The County Commission Association sent a letter saying we're against it," said Uinta County Commissioner Mick Powers.

"It's a crying shame and a lot of land."

Senator John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) also opposed the plan.

"We know how to manage our lands, not a Congresswoman from New York," Barrasso said. "It's interesting to note that not one member of Congress from the affected area supports this bill."

The Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act would designate areas in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming as wilderness.

"Once again we've got outsiders out of touch with the West meddling in our land," Barrasso said. "These outsiders have no concept of multiple use of the land."

The U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee announced last week that its subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands would hold a hearing on May 5 on the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, H.R. 980.

Existing land management, which emphasizes multiple use and focuses on the national forest system as the land of many uses, provides for healthy local economies and tax bases, including recreation, tourism, resource extraction, and the preservation of local custom and culture.

Conversely, H.R. 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, would put the squeeze on local communities, shutting out many of these existing uses in favor of a "preservation" system, officials said Tuesday.

The end result would be harm to local rural communities like the ones that make up each of western Wyoming's counties. NREPA would designate all of the inventoried roadless areas in the Northern Rockies as wilderness.

If enacted, this bill would shut the public out of areas that are often the hub of local outdoor activities.

"Those of us in Wyoming are proud of the way our state has helped manage and protect our public lands and resources. Good stewardship of the land is a Wyoming value. As a rancher by trade, I hold that ideal in the highest regard. This bill takes the opposite approach to land management in Wyoming and portions of four other western states by locking up more than 24 million acres in the West from the vast majority of responsible, shared uses," said Rep. Cynthia Lummis (WY-at large)

Currently the bill is being reviewed by the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee's subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands.