December 7, 2014

Honorable Members
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Senators:


Title XXX would result in a net loss of wildland and wildlife protection on tens of millions of acres of public land. The provisions would undermine some of our nation’s preeminent environmental and public lands laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Wilderness Act, would give landscapes deemed sacred by Native American tribes to a foreign-owned mining company, and would diminish the federal estate held in trust for all Americans as an important part of our natural birthright.

Though certainly not an exhaustive list, the following provisions exemplify the problems with the bill:

Sec. 3002, Sealaska Land Entitlement Finalization, would give away 70,000 acres of the Tongass National Forest to Sealaska, a Native Corporation notorious for some of the worst logging practices in Southeast Alaska. The land giveaway would settle land claims outside the selection area Sealaska Corporation was assigned under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Nearly all of the 70,000 acres of forests, including ancient forests, are likely to be logged with minimal environmental regulation. This giveaway has faced strong opposition from grassroots Southeast Alaska conservation groups, many Native people, and communities that would be harmed by intensive clearcutting and the loss of forest habitat.

Sec. 3003, Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation, would trade 2,400 acres of national forest land protected by Executive Order in 1955 to Resolution Copper, a foreign-controlled mining company, in order to facilitate the development of a copper mine that has long been opposed by local interests. The lands are considered sacred by Native American tribes, who have successfully fought the land trade for years.

Sec. 3009, Northern Nevada Land Conveyances. This part of the bill encompasses several sales and conveyances of public land, including the sale of over 11,500 acres to the town of Yerington to facilitate mining. (Locations and acreages of the public lands near Yerington and several other conveyances are not even provided in the legislation, but cited to a map residing in a local Bureau of Land Management field office).

Sec. 3023, Grazing Permits and Leases, would automatically renew livestock grazing permits on tens of millions of acres of public lands even where grazing operations are
degrading wildlife habitat and fouling streams and rivers. No environmental analysis under NEPA, and no compliance with other applicable laws, would be required at the time of renewal, inhibiting citizens’ ability to protect public lands from harm. Sec. 3023 would further exacerbate habitat degradation that imperils the sage grouse and hasten the need for the species’ protection under the Endangered Species Act.

**Sec. 3064 and 3066, Pine Forest Range Wilderness and Wovoka Wilderness**, respectively, would grant exceptions to the Wilderness Act allowing the State of Nevada to routinely land helicopters and manipulate natural habitat conditions in direct contravention of basic tenets of the Wilderness Act. Such provisions diminish the meaning of Wilderness and degrade the National Wilderness Preservation System.

**Sec. 3065, Rocky Mountain Front Conservation and Management Area and Wilderness Additions**, removes wilderness study area (WSA) protections from two BLM WSAs in eastern Montana, hundreds of miles from the lands involved in the Rocky Mountain Front bill. This stealth provision was inserted in the bill despite never having been publicly discussed nor included in any legislation previously pending before Congress.

While there are provisions relating to public lands that would draw broad support from the conservation community as stand-alone legislation, their inclusion in the Defense authorization bill renders them untenable. This kitchen-sink approach to legislation, lacking in deliberation and shaped solely by political calculus, belies the very serious consequences of the provisions. The price our public lands at large must pay in exchange for a few modest Wildernesses designations is simply too high.

We urge you to oppose the inclusion of Title XXX in the Defense bill and to work to remove the public lands’ provisions from this legislation.

Sincerely,

Wilderness Watch  Greenpeace  Washington, DC
Missoula, MT

Western Lands Project  WildEarth Guardians  Santa Fe, NM
Seattle, WA

Center for Biological Diversity  Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance  Salt Lake City, UT
Tucson, AZ

Western Watersheds Project  RESTORE: The North Woods  Hallowell, ME
Hailey, ID

Heartwood  Save America’s Forests  Washington, DC
Bloomington, IN

Swan View Coalition  Conservation Congress  Livingston, MT
Kalispell, MT
Los Padres Forest Watch  
Santa Barbara, CA

Klamath Forest Alliance  
Orleans, CA

North Cascades Conservation Council  
Seattle, WA

Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community  
Sitka, AK

Californians for Western Wilderness  
San Francisco, CA

Wild Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Yellowstone to Uintas Connection  
Paris, ID

Idaho Sporting Congress  
Boise, ID

Western Wildlife Conservancy  
Salt Lake City, UT

The California Chaparral Institute  
Escondido, CA

Alliance for the Wild Rockies  
Helena, MT

Friends of the Bitterroot  
Hamilton, MT

Kootenai Environmental Alliance  
Coeur d'Alene, ID

Friends of the Clearwater  
Moscow, ID

Massachusetts Forest Watch  
Northampton, MA

Epic-Environmental Protection Information Center, Arcata, CA

Kentucky Heartwood  
Berea, KY

Montana Environmental Information Center, Helena, MT

Wild Wilderness  
Bend, OR

WildWest Institute  
Missoula, MT

River Runners for Wilderness  
Flagstaff, AZ

Allegheny Defense Project  
Kane, PA

Big Wild Advocates  
Emigrant, MT

Big Wild Adventures  
Emigrant, MT

Central Sierra Wilderness Watch  
Twain Harte, CA

Friends of Bell Smith Springs  
Stonefort, IL

High Sierra Hikers Association  
South Lake Tahoe, CA

Friends of the Wild Swan  
Swan Lake, MT

Montana Ecosystems Defense Council  
Kalispell, MT

Wild Utah Project  
Salt Lake City, UT
American Wild Horse Preservation
Campaign
Lompoc, CA

WildLands Defense
Boise, ID

Save our Sky Blue Waters
Duluth, MN

Groundwater Awareness League
Green Valley, AZ

Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper
Moab, UT

Dana Thynes, Mayor
City of Kupreanof, AK