

Testimony of:  
Mr. Reid Haughey, President  
The Wilderness Land Trust

House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
March 21, 2012



Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Reid Haughey and I am the President of the Wilderness Land Trust. We are a small not-for-profit organization focused on protecting designated wilderness by working cooperatively with landowners who own private property within designated and proposed wilderness areas. We acquire such properties from willing sellers with the intent to transfer ownership to the United States.

Last year our Board Chair, Jim Blomquist, testified that continued modest funding of the Inholding Accounts for the four land management agencies within the Land and Water Conservation Fund is vital to the success of securing and preserving wilderness designated by Congress, while treating private landowners within these areas fairly.

I am before you today to thank you for your support for such modest funding in 2012 and to ask for that support once again. An appropriation of between \$3 and 5 million to each of the land management agencies, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service, is sufficient to enable the agencies to acquire high priority inholdings from willing sellers.

We are not asking Congress to undertake a new acquisition program, or significantly expand federal ownership. We ask that Congress continue to complete the wilderness preservation it has undertaken, and to provide private landowners who wish to sell the opportunity to transfer their land within designated wilderness to public ownership.

The Fiscal Year 2013 President's Budget Request does not include funding for the Forest Service Critical Inholdings account, substituting a new Priority Recreational Access program. We are not here to comment on that program, except to say that it cannot take the place of the Inholdings Account which has a 50 year track record

**The Wilderness Land Trust**

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of proven success and a different focused mission. Any new program should be evaluated and considered as a project for Congress to review as a matter of course, not substituted within administrative accounts for a long-supported effort by Congress to complete the work it has already determined to undertake, through funding the inholding accounts.

Consistent funding for the inholding accounts is vital. Without consistent funding, numerous opportunities to acquire private parcels within designated wilderness areas and other congressionally identified areas worthy of protection will be lost, often for at least another generation.

We spoke with you last year about several critical acquisitions that could not have been completed without a commitment to inholding acquisition:

- The successful transfer to public ownership of the last remaining 640-acre private inholding in the Hells Canyon Wilderness of Arizona, which completed the wilderness, preserved the canyon for which it was named and ended 37 years of on and off litigation between the landowner and BLM over access;
- The completed acquisition of the trail trailhead and parking lot for the West Maroon Pass Trail, the most used trail segment in the wilderness system, which was built on private land the Forest Service assumed it owned, since it owned everything around it.
- The purchase by the Trust of three private properties in the newly designated Owyhee Wildernesses, which controlled the access to Little Jacks Creek Wilderness and the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness.

We have now completed and transferred the three properties in the Owyhees, creating a trailhead along the Mud Flat Road for Little Jacks Creek and securing the public's access to it and the North Fork Owyhee Wilderness. The Trust is now working with another landowner interested in selling the land they own that controls access to two more Owyhee Wilderness areas.

Since last year, a total of nine properties in five states, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho and Washington have been transferred to federal ownership by The Wilderness Land Trust. Other organizations have done additional work. The average purchase price of the four properties we transferred this past year that were paid for through the inholding accounts was \$76,958 apiece. Pretty low. The support you showed for these transactions inspired the donation of just over \$3.5 million of wilderness inholdings in the same period through our organization. This exemplifies the commitment of your constituents to the acquisition of wilderness inholdings and the fair treatment of inholding landowners.

There is more work to be done. Within the boundaries of our federally designated Wilderness Areas there remain more than 400,000 acres of privately owned land. While the Wilderness Act defines Wilderness Areas as places where “the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” private landowners rightly retain their rights to build roads, homes and other buildings, extend utilities, and extract minerals and timber.

We have projects ready to go and queued up with the owners of inholdings within wilderness. Additional opportunities are emerging in the Owyhees Wilderness Areas and throughout the west. For example –

- The owners of several family owned mining claims and timber lands within designated wilderness in Washington State have approached us and want to sell their properties to be included in the wilderness that surrounds them.
- A 90 year old horseback rider who owns land in the Ventana Wilderness of California has decided to curtail her wilderness horsemanship and sell her property deep within the Ventana.
- Deep in the Weminuche Wilderness of southwest Colorado are 160 acres of private land that has road access. The owner has decided to sell. We want to add it to the wilderness that surrounds it, rather than have it go to another owner who will simply continue to try to develop it and use the designated wilderness as a backdrop for his real estate scheme.

Additional owners in multiple States have approached us. If you fund the inholding accounts, we will be back next year with more stories of success completing already designated wilderness and helping those private landowners, who often feel trapped within designated wilderness, but were promised that their land would be purchased at a fair market price if they chose to sell.

In summary, continued consistent funding of the inholding accounts is vital. Without such funding, significant opportunities to acquire private parcels within our designated wilderness areas will be lost for at least another generation. We urge your support of funding for these account.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate your time and consideration and the support of the Subcommittee in securing these appropriations. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.