

Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America Position Statement

July 30, 2016

Oppose Transfer of Federal Lands to the States

Background:

Since the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, federal lands have been set aside “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people”. The federal estate now includes our National Parks and Monuments, National Forests and Grasslands, and National Wildlife Refuges. These lands preserve the best of our wild places where nature can still work as it should. They provide access to millions of acres of land where Americans can enjoy outdoor recreation. And they protect our nation’s most outstanding scenic, cultural and historic places.

In addition, much our federal estate is managed on a sustainable basis to provide economic benefits to the nation. These include the opportunity to harvest fish and game resources, the provision of timber and other forest products, lands for grazing livestock, and support of the outdoor recreation industry.

For most Americans, access to our public lands and waters is the only opportunity they have to participate in and enjoy outdoor recreation in a natural landscape. Access to public lands is a cornerstone of our national experience and one of the most important freedoms that we enjoy.

Sadly, over time, many attempts have been made to strip our federal public lands away from the American people by powerful interest’ to be used for private economic gain. The latest example of this is legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress, H.R 3650 and H.R.2316, that would transfer some National Forest lands in the western U.S. to the states.

H.R. 3650 – State National Forest Management Act of 2015 would direct the Department of Agriculture to convey up to 2 million acres of the National Forest System to the states to be administered and managed primarily for timber production.

H.R. 2316 – Self-Sufficient Community Lands Act would direct the Department of Agriculture to establish community forest demonstration areas of 200,000 acres or more in a state by taking National Forest System lands to be managed by the state for timber production.

The justification given by the promoters of these bills is a decline in timber sale revenues by the U.S. Forest Service. While revenues have been down during the past two decades, the primary reason for this decline is easy to understand.

The U.S. Forest Service has had to use more and more of its limited budget reserves for wildfire suppression efforts instead of land management. This has been compounded by severe droughts in the west and more homes and cabins in forest areas that need protection. At the same time that work load for the Forest Service has grown, budgets authorized by Congress have not even kept pace with inflation. It is hypocritical for Congress to blame the Forest Service for lower timber sale revenues when Congress is responsible for providing an adequate budget to accomplish their work. This is a poorly veiled attempt to steal lands from the American public and give it to the states where the land would be highly vulnerable to exploitation for private gain.

The creation of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge and protection of the Boundary Waters were the first two federal lands projects supported by the fledgling Izaak Walton League. Since our beginning, the establishment and protection of federal lands have been one of the highest priorities of the League and one of the most important ways that we can be defenders of our soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife. We must be continually diligent to prevent the loss or mismanagement of our federal lands and oppose any efforts to divest the American people of this precious heritage.

RESOLVE:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, on July 30, 2016, strongly opposes passage of H.R. 3650 and H.R.2316, bills that would transfer western U.S. Forest Service Lands to the states.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that the Minnesota Division asks the National Izaak Walton League of America to do the same

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that we oppose any and all attempts to divest the American public of their precious federal lands, and we expect the Congress of the United States to stand in the gap for the American people and to safeguard their right to keep all of our federal public lands for the benefit and enjoyment of the people and the protection of the flora and fauna therein.

Submitted by the W. J. McCabe Chapter