

Testimony of Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
on H.R. 980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA)
to the House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Tuesday, May 5 at 2:00 p.m.
1334 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, members of the subcommittee, I thank you for inviting me to testify about H.R.980, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. I especially want to thank Chairman Grijalva for being the lead cosponsor of NREPA.

So far this Congress, NREPA has garnered the support of 71 bipartisan cosponsors from 31 states. It has grassroots support in the areas affected by the legislation. It is supported by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Friends of the Clearwater, The Humane Society and, over the years, by hundreds of other organizations and local businesses in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

NREPA differs from traditional state-by-state wilderness bills by offering a variety of designations that work in concert to achieve one goal: the protection of entire functioning ecosystems. It is a bill focused on sound science—not on arbitrary political boundaries. After all, watersheds don't stay within one Congressional District, animals don't know when they've crossed a political boundary, and forests span millions of miles with no regard for state-lines.

Mr. Chairman, I know there will be a healthy discussion of the bill this afternoon. I want to start out by talking generally about what the bill does and what it doesn't do. I'm pleased that later you'll hear testimony from experts from the region, some of whom have been working on NREPA for even longer than I have.

At its core, NREPA does three simple things: It protects, employs, and saves.

NREPA protects. It protects entire functioning ecosystems by designating 24 million acres of America's premiere roadless lands as wilderness. It also protects the rivers and streams that are the last habitats for many of America's wild trout stocks, by designating some 1,800 miles of rivers and streams as wild and scenic rivers. Most importantly, by protecting natural biological corridors, NREPA links all these wild places together into a functioning ecological whole.

NREPA also employs. The bill will create about 2,300 well-paying jobs to restore over 1 million acres of damaged habitat and watershed. In trying economic times, green jobs like these are so important.

Finally, NREPA saves—it saves taxpayers' money by eliminating wasteful subsidies to the timber industry to conduct logging on federal lands. These forests are money losers,

and ultimately the American taxpayers are paying for the logging to continue in these particular federal forests. NREPA saves taxpayers money by prohibiting road building and logging in the areas designated as wilderness.

I want to be very clear about what NREPA doesn't do. NREPA does not impact private landowners. It impacts only public lands—lands owned by all Americans. We all have a right and responsibility to protect our precious resources.

Now, you'll hear some people say that NREPA is an easterner's attempt to put in place a "top down" approach. This could not be further from the truth. Experts and activists from the Northern Rockies region, who had been working on NREPA since the early 1990s, approached me and former-Rep. Shays. They asked us to sponsor the bill because legislators in their own states would not do what needs to be done to protect ecosystems. This is a home-grown, grassroots bill that by necessity had to go elsewhere to find a sponsor.

I hope you will continue to debate these issues in a thoughtful and responsible way. If nothing else, the American people should take comfort in the fact that we continue to debate how much land to protect instead of whether to protect land at all.

Some years ago, two NREPA supporters from Manhattan, *Montana* wrote to me and said "We feel that there is a little ray of hope for the incredible but dwindling wildlands we are so lucky to live near and love." All of us have a responsibility to sustain that hope.

Again, I thank Chairman Grijalva for allowing me to be here today and for holding this hearing. Thank you.