

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RRESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1281, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN RIVERS AND STREAMS OF THE HEADWATERS OF THE SNAKE RIVER SYSTEM AS ADDITIONS TO THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM.**

**MAY 15, 2007**

---

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S.1281, a bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by designating portions of the Snake River System in Wyoming as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Department supports the designation of the waters included in S.1281 that flow through lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS). While we support the approach taken by S.1281 in protecting the watershed of the Snake River headwaters, we defer to the Department of Agriculture in regard to the portions of the bill that designate segments of rivers that flow through lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service. In addition, we suggest several technical amendments which are described later in this testimony.

S. 1281 would designate the Lewis River in Yellowstone National Park from Shoshone Lake to Lewis Lake as Wild, and from Lewis Lake to its confluence with the Snake River as Scenic. The Snake River, from its source in the Teton Wilderness and then flowing through Yellowstone, the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and Grand Teton National Park, would be designated as Wild above Jackson Lake. From one mile below the Jackson Lake Dam until

leaving Grand Teton, the Snake and its tributaries Pacific Creek, the Buffalo Fork, and the Gros Ventre River would be designated as Scenic.

Efforts to designate the upper Snake River system as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System have been led by the Campaign for the Snake Headwaters, a grassroots effort led by local citizens, businesses, anglers, boaters, and conservationists.

The headwaters of the Snake River, which begin in the Bridger-Teton National Forest then run through southern Yellowstone National Park into the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway and Grand Teton National Park in northwest Wyoming, are some of the purest waters in the nation. The headwaters are a stronghold for native cutthroat trout, harbor a vast array of bird and wildlife populations, and the Snake River and its tributaries provide diverse recreational opportunities for visitors to, and residents of, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The Snake River above Jackson Lake was initially evaluated for eligibility in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System in the 1980s. In 2005, NPS resource managers conducted an evaluation of the Snake River below Jackson Lake, as well as major tributaries within Grand Teton National Park, the Buffalo Fork, Pacific Creek, and the Gros Ventre River. The evaluations were made in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, following procedures they recommended and used to evaluate segments of the waterways located on neighboring national forest lands. The evaluations, in accordance with section 5(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, document the outstanding recreational, scenic, cultural, geological, and ecological values of the upper Snake River system, which merit its inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Designation of Snake River System waters would support the spirit and intent of existing management plans for Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, including the 1997 Snake River Management Plan for Grand Teton and the 1980 General Management Plan for the Parkway. Yellowstone's Statement for Management (November 1991) states that a prime objective is to conserve and protect the integrity of Yellowstone's natural resources, recognizing human interaction as a part of that ecosystem.

If designated as components of the National Wild and Scenic River System, the river segments in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway will continue to provide a range of recreational opportunities for private and commercial floating and fishing, as well as an array of backcountry and non-wilderness recreational activities in the river corridors.

Consistent with the Act that established Grand Teton National Park in 1950, we anticipate that wild and scenic designation of the Snake River would not affect the Bureau of Reclamation's operation and maintenance of Jackson Lake Dam and water levels in Jackson Lake reservoir, a natural lake augmented for nearly 100 years by a dam for purposes of irrigation and flood control. Additionally, we anticipate that monitoring and equipment maintenance activities that are now carried out by the Bureau of Reclamation upstream of Jackson Lake, such as streamgaging and snowpack measurement, would continue. Designation as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System would provide additional protection for the outstanding

scenic, recreational, and wildlife resources above and below Jackson Lake on National Park System lands.

S. 1281 also provides for quantification of a federal reserved water right for each river segment, and for funds to develop river management plans. The Department is currently reviewing the impact that this process could have on existing uses in the basin. The NPS would cooperate with adjacent national forest managers, the Bureau of Reclamation, cooperative organizations, State and local government agencies, and interested members of the public to develop appropriate planning guidance for the rivers designated under this bill.

We would be pleased to work with the Subcommittee on several technical amendments that would strengthen S. 1281. In particular, we suggest that sections 3 and 6 be clarified to state that some of the river segments identified in the bill are within Yellowstone National Park and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway. We would also like to work with the Subcommittee regarding the operation of section 5 governing federal reserved water rights. Also, a number of river segments described in the bill form the boundary between national park and national forest lands, and in the case of the Gros Ventre River between Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As written, we believe the legislation could lead to confusion as to which agency is responsible for administration of these segments, and would suggest that the bill be amended to clarify the jurisdiction.

Mr. Chairman that completes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.