

By Kevin McCarthy September 19, 2011 [Link](#)

America is home to countless natural wonders, many of which are right in our backyard. Everyone should be able to enjoy our rivers, lakes and forests, and there is no question that the federal government has a role to play in ensuring they are around for future generations. However, like many areas of the federal government, unnecessary overregulation can have negative impacts not only on our economy, but on our environment as well. In the case of public lands, the federal government is essentially locking the public out of more than 43 million acres nationwide, limiting enjoyment, hampering firefighting efforts and stifling job creation and economic growth in many communities.

Several decades ago, the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service began to inventory their lands and recommended a combined 43 million acres as unsuitable for wilderness, meaning they didn't have the characteristics to qualify them for wilderness preservation. In classic Washington style, Congress never acted on these recommendations, leaving these lands under restrictive management practices that severely limit access and activities. I introduced the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act (HR 1581) to lift the unnecessarily restrictive management practices and open these lands up for responsible multiple uses.

It is important to note that my legislation refers to only the 43 million acres already studied and recommended unsuitable for wilderness. It does not impact areas already designated as wilderness (109 million acres), recommended for wilderness (15 million acres) or still under study (10.7 million acres). Furthermore, it does not spell out what should occur on these lands, but puts the decision-making process in the hands of local communities. In our area, for example, there are 218,000 acres that could be opened up for a variety of uses -- much of it around Lake Isabella and in the Sequoia National Forest. It would be up to the local federal forest and land managers, as well as surrounding communities, to decide what, if any, new activities could occur on these lands.

Activities could include increased grazing, responsible resource development, increased recreation and healthy forest management. Many of these could have positive economic and environmental impacts. Healthy forest management could reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires (and the pollution they produce) by decreasing the amount of fallen and rotting tree limbs and underbrush that fuel fires, as well as giving firefighters better access to fight them. Increased recreational opportunities could give a bump to local economies by increasing

tourism, and responsible resource development could create new jobs and reduce our dependence on foreign energy. Any activities would have to go through the environmental review process and nothing prevents communities from continuing to prohibit activities. My bill returns land management decisions to local communities who know best how to manage their lands -- not bureaucrats thousands of miles away in Washington.

This legislation is just common sense, which is why 31 of my colleagues have signed on as co-sponsors and more than 60 groups are supporting it, and I look forward to working to move HR 1581 through Congress