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### **PLC, NCBA Support Legislation to Release Land Unsuitable for Wilderness Designation**

WASHINGTON (May 2, 2011) – Rather than responsibly managing federal lands for multiple uses, including livestock grazing, as it is obligated to do, the federal government has severely restricted access to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land intended for multiple-use management by locking up millions of acres as Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) and Inventoried Roadless Areas, according to Dustin Van Liew, [Public Lands Council](#) (PLC) executive director and [National Cattlemen's Beef Association](#) (NCBA) director of federal lands. House Minority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) recently introduced H.R. 1581, the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act, to release federal lands that have been recognized as unsuitable for wilderness or roadless designations.

“For far too long, the federal government has needlessly locked up tens of millions of acres of federal lands across the western United States and ignored its obligation to manage those acres for multiple use activities,” Van Liew said. “BLM and USFS have determined that significant areas of land are unsuitable for wilderness designation and roadless areas. We strongly support Congressman McCarthy’s commonsense bill that follows the agencies’ recommendations.”

The Wilderness Act of 1964 directed the executive branch to identify federal lands with wilderness characteristics and to manage for the maintenance of those lands until such time Congress acted. Unfortunately, Congress has not acted and millions of acres have been sitting in limbo for as many as 30 years. According to the Wilderness Act, Congress has the sole authority to designate land as wilderness. Van Liew said the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act would finally release those lands and require them to be managed for multiple uses.

BLM manages nearly 13 million acres in 546 WSAs, of which the agency has declared 6.72 million acres are unsuitable for wilderness designation. H.R. 1581 would release these lands that under current law must be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics and require BLM to manage those lands for multiple uses and prohibit any restrictions in the future.

Van Liew said in 1979 the USFS determined that 36.1 million acres were not suitable for designation. However, in 2001, the Clinton administration issued a nationwide rule for roadless area management, regardless of wilderness suitability, that imposed stringent land-use restrictions. Congressman McCarthy’s legislation would release lands USFS determined were not suitable for roadless designations.

“Finally, Congress appears to be willing to make a long overdue decision on these study areas which have been held prisoner by the bureaucracy of the federal government,” Van Liew said. “We urge the House to take action on this legislation to end the uncertainty on millions of acres and revive struggling rural economies throughout the West relying on multiple-use activities.”