



U.S. House of Representatives Rejects Lands Bill – No More Wilderness For Now

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On March 11, 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives failed, by two votes, to achieve the needed 2/3 vote to pass Senate Bill 22, an omnibus lands bill that included over 160 bills that would have created millions of acres of wilderness areas in the western United States. The House attempted to pass the bill under a suspension of the normal rules, thereby evading lengthy debate and the ability to offer amendments to the bill.

One of the other key provisions of the bill would have formally created the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) to manage 27 million acres of public lands. The NLCS, created under President Clinton, is currently an administratively-created system for managing Bureau of Land Management lands, National Monuments, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Historic and Scenic Trails. The bill would have given final statutory approval to the system that has provided little management direction, and only adds another layer of bureaucracy to the management of federal lands.

It is very likely that this omnibus bill and possibly other specific wilderness bills will be brought up for a vote again in the very near future. House and Senate leaders have different approaches, however, for final passage of the bill. Some House members plan to separate their individual bills and introduce them as separate stand alone measures. To increase the chances of passing the omnibus lands bill in the House, the Senate may reintroduce the bill with a provision to allow continued hunting and fishing on lands that are currently open to both.