

February 2, 2009

Dear Representative:

Humans who inhabit and use the Earth's land do not own it. The Earth is the Lord's, and we are tenants who hold the land in trust from God and in partnership with all creatures. Through God, the land nourishes all life and provides us with the space and resources we need to survive. As part of our call to be stewards of creation, we have a duty to use the land responsibly, to manage it so that it serves the good of all, and to protect it for future generations and for all life. We write you today about a special place that needs your attention to ensure we maintain our responsible stewardship of Earth.

The Wyoming Range is an isolated range of peaks rising up from sloping foothills and vast sagebrush plains in western Wyoming. Those who venture into this backcountry will discover one of Wyoming's best kept secrets—creeks plunging over spectacular falls, pristine high lakes, large herds of moose, deer and elk, blue-ribbon fisheries, open meadows, and rust-colored peaks more than 11,000 feet in elevation. These mountains receive some of the highest levels of snowfall in the state, and due to this, act as an Eden for wildlife and provide lush habitat in an arid west. The Wyoming Range Legacy Act, Title III, Subtitle C in the S. 22, the Public Land Management Omnibus Act, ensures that this natural beauty remains as God created it.

The character of the American people and indeed of the biblical story would not be the same without such wild places. From Moses to Daniel Boone and Jim Bridger, biblical and American pioneers alike were shaped and tested by their experiences in wild nature.

Before the arrival of white explorers and pioneers, the Wyoming Range was home to Native Americans, who left evidence of prehistoric use, mostly as summer hunting grounds, from at least 6,000 years ago. During the westward migration of the 1800s, the Wyoming Range forced pioneers on the Oregon Trail to take long detours. But in 1857, Frederick Lander blazed an alternative route across the range at Thompson Pass. The famous Lander Cutoff, the first western wagon road commissioned by the federal government, carried 13,000 immigrants its first year. Many pioneers didn't make it, and their marked graves still sit along the route, as do visible ruts of wagon wheels. We cherish this heritage and its rich blessings, whether as a shaper of identity or as a source of beauty, recreation, refinement, and inspiration. At the same time, we must take action to preserve that heritage for future generations.

Wild lands and open spaces have always been central to the Judeo-Christian tradition, playing a vital role in the spiritual journeys of Biblical peoples from Moses to Jesus Christ. Through the land, God nourishes life; provides the foundation of terrestrial ecosystems and human communities; supplies blessings of sustenance like soil, water, timber and minerals; and offers natural space for prayer and spiritual renewal. Stewardship of the lands and wild places God has entrusted to our care is both a critical part of our call to protect creation and a responsibility shared by all citizens.

Today the Wyoming Range remains rich in wildlife and also supports outstanding recreational opportunities for local families, sportsmen and the area's blue-collar and oilfield workers. Its pristine

streams provide much-needed summer irrigation water for ranchers downstream. For over a hundred years, the Wyoming Range has sustained both wildlife and human uses, in balance.

Our nation's largest producing natural gas fields lie adjacent to these majestic mountains, in the Upper Green River valley. The vast petroleum resources that our nation needs lie under these sage-covered basins on BLM lands, and not under the forested flanks of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in the Wyoming Range. This landscape, part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, needs to be managed responsibly. The Wyoming Range is a refuge of clean air and water and crucial habitat for wildlife in contrast to the industrialized BLM public lands next to it. We need to draw a line at the national forest boundary to prevent new energy leasing and development in the Wyoming Range, to ensure this balance. By supporting S. 22, including the Wyoming Range Legacy Act, you can make sure this happens.

From towering mountains to majestic forests to the wide-open fields that provide food for our tables, God's lands are an integral part of creation. As development threats to God's gifts become more pronounced, our call to become educated and involved becomes more immediate.

Sincerely,

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches of Christ, USA  
Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office  
United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
Wyoming Association of Churches