

Statement of Glenn Casamassa
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Before the
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining
Concerning
S. 2078 – Advancing Conservation and Education Act
August 22, 2018

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding S. 2078 – Advancing Conservation and Education Act. I am Glenn Casamassa, Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System (NFS), USDA Forest Service.

S. 2078 would authorize the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to create a process to allow States to relinquish State land grant parcels wholly or primarily within eligible areas in the eleven contiguous western States and Alaska in exchange for select public land under the jurisdiction of DOI's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the State.

The bill defines "eligible areas" as lands within the outer boundaries of units or components of the National Park, National Wilderness Preservation, National Wildlife Refuge, or National Landscape Conservation Systems; areas identified BLM as having wilderness characteristics; certain designated lands within the National Forest System; and sentinel landscapes designated by USDA, DOI, or the U.S. Department of Defense.

The exchanges would be for equal value, and the bill establishes requirements for lands conveyed by a State to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture regarding hazardous materials, water rights, grazing permits, road rights-of-way and other valid existing rights.

USDA supports adjustments in land ownership that benefit the management of the National Forest System, while allowing states to better manage land-grant parcels for their original purposes. As S. 2078 applies to the Forest Service, it would provide a method that is not available under existing land exchange authorities to achieve these twin goals by allowing the conveyance of State lands for National Forest System purposes in exchange for public lands under BLM management.

Because we are not in a position to judge the effect of S. 2078 on public lands, we defer to DOI for its views on the effect of S. 2078 regarding lands within its jurisdiction.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill and I look forward to your questions.