

**Statement of Richard Moe, President
The National Trust for Historic Preservation
before the
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
Chairman Ron Wyden
on**

**S.1139 – To Establish the National Landscape Conservation System
Thursday, May 3, 2007
2:30 PM**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Richard Moe and I am the President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. I am speaking to you today in support of S. 1139, a bill introduced by Senator Bingaman that would recognize the National Landscape Conservation System, lands that comprise the crown jewels of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) inventory. The National Trust is very pleased and grateful that Senator Bingaman, along with Senator Salazar, is leading the effort to codify the Conservation System and I urge your support for this measure.

Background on the National Trust

For more than 50 years, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has been helping to protect the nation's historic resources. Chartered by Congress in 1949, the National Trust is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. Recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Trust leads a vigorous preservation movement that is saving the best of our past for the future by preserving America's diverse historic places and revitalizing communities. Its Washington, DC headquarters staff, six regional offices and 29 historic sites work with the Trust's quarter-million members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. Its mission has expanded since its founding in 1949 just as the need for historic preservation has grown. When historic places are destroyed or allowed to deteriorate we lose a part of our past forever.

S. 1139 and the Conservation System

S.1139 provides an important Congressional stamp of approval by affording the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System permanent statutory recognition. Like many Americans, I thought for a long time that historic preservation was just about saving grand historic and architectural landmarks. There is no question that this is part of what preservation is all about. But the more time I have spent in the West, the more I have realized that preservation is much more than that. It is also about the very first imprints that man made on the land – the rock art, cliff dwellings, pueblos, kivas and other

remnants of the earliest civilizations that flourished there. These cultural resources, mostly found in the West, represent the opening chapters in the story of America. They represent the heritage of the first Americans and thus are part of our heritage as well. Not all of these tremendous places are in the Conservation System's inventory, but those that are represent the top tier of this country's acreage under the Bureau of Land Management.

The National Landscape Conservation System is a network of the last places where you can experience the history and wild beauty of the American West. The 26-million-acre System was established by the Secretary of the Interior in 2000 to recognize and protect the best of the lands and waters managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Conservation System brings together the crown jewels of BLM's 264 million acres—specifically, all the agency's National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Scenic and Historic Trails, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas. With more than 866 individual units, it comprises 10 percent of the land managed by the BLM.

Formal codification would provide the System with the heightened recognition it deserves. Without authorization, there currently is no guarantee that the System will be around five years from now.

Icons of the American Experience

This month we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent settlement in English-speaking America. But, for thousands of years before the first Europeans arrived, there were people on this continent who represented highly developed civilizations and who were proficient in art, architecture, agriculture and astronomy. These were the first Americans, and their story is also part of our common heritage. The National Landscape Conservation System contains a number of important areas rich in artifacts from these civilizations. Let me share with you two examples.

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument lies in the far southwestern corner of Colorado. The mesas and canyons of this place encompass an incredibly rich collection of archaeological sites. More than 6,000 have been recorded, and thousands more are believed to exist – up to 300 sites per square mile in some areas, the highest known density in the United States. The full sweep of the region's history can be traced in this landscape – from the early ranchers whose descendants still live here, all the way back to the ancient hunters who crossed the area 10,000 years ago. I wish every American could experience Canyons of the Ancients. There is no other place like it.

The Agua Fria National Monument is located 40 miles north of Phoenix. While it's not nearly as large as Canyons of the Ancients, Agua Fria is abundantly rich in archaeological resources, including more than 130 pueblo sites, stone forts, terraced agricultural fields and a stunning array of rock art. Scientists have linked many of these sites to the Perry Mesa Tradition, a previously unknown culture that flourished here from 500 to 700 years ago. More recent history is reflected in the remnants of Basque

sheepherders' camps, mining structures and military sites – all scattered across a landscape that makes the monument a scenic, as well as cultural, treasure.

I urge your support of Senator Bingaman's legislation before the Subcommittee today. Congress should codify the Conservation System. Official statutory basis would raise recognition of the unique archeological and cultural resources of the Conservation System. This does not mean that BLM must abandon its traditional multiple-use mandate. Clearly, people should have wide access to BLM lands and be able to enjoy them. In fact, Codification of the Conservation System *would not* impact private in-holdings or lands managed by other agencies; alter existing oil and gas or grazing leases or other grandfathered uses; limit public access or activities such as fishing and hunting; or in any way affect units that are co-managed with other federal agencies, as only BLM lands would be included in the System. It would not affect the underlying enabling legislation for individual units.

Conclusion

The National Landscape Conservation System includes landscapes that allow us to see the West through the eyes of its original inhabitants, or as it appeared to the first European explorers and settlers. It also includes the tangible remains of thousands of years of human interaction with the land, ranging from the ruins of prehistoric Native American pueblos to the wagon ruts left by westward-bound pioneers and the remnants of mineshafts and farmhouses left by those who sought to make a living out of the rock and soil of the Western frontier. Whether natural or cultural, these resources open windows to the past, offering a glimpse – often the only glimpse available to us – of the people who were here before us, the land they found here and the lives they lived on it.

S. 1139 will Congressionally recognize perhaps the last great American system of protected lands. By enacting codifying legislation, Congress will ensure the System's permanence and an enduring legacy of the West's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.