

Public Lands Foundation, National Association of Forest Service Retirees, National Wildlife
Refuge Association, Association of Retired Fish and Wildlife Employees, and Coalition to
Protect America's National Parks

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
113 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510-2402

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3011

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3217

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
Subcommittee Conservation and Forestry
U.S. House of Representatives
2405 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge
Ranking Member
Subcommittee Conservation and Forestry
U.S. House of Representatives
2344 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
U.S. House of Representatives
2236 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Fudge, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva and Congressman Chaffetz:

The Public Lands Foundation, National Association of Forest Service Retirees, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Association of Retired Fish and Wildlife Employees and Coalition to Protect America's National Parks strongly oppose H.R. 622, a bill to terminate the law enforcement functions of the U. S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

The BLM and the Forest Service have conducted law enforcement and investigative activities for well over a century. The predecessor agency to the BLM was the U.S. General Land Office (GLO) who appointed their first special agents (law enforcement officers) as far back as 1832. The statutory authority that provides law enforcement authority to the U.S. Forest Service is their 1905 enabling legislation. These authorities were absolutely necessary to enable agents and forest rangers to carry out their duties in an effective and efficient manner.

We are also concerned that the language of this bill, while stating that it only pertains to BLM or Forest Service lands, could also be used to end law enforcement activities on national wildlife refuge and national park lands. Millions of visitors visit our public lands every year for activities such as sightseeing, hunting, angling, hiking, and camping. It would be highly irresponsible to end federal law enforcement activities on public lands, which serve to protect those visitors.

Among the statements given in the legislative history preceding passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 included:

“Certainly there is a critical need to provide the Department of the Interior, through its Bureau of Land Management, with adequate enforcement authority on the national resource lands. Crimes against persons, vandalism and destruction of private and Federal property, thefts, and other unlawful acts are increasing rapidly on the national resource lands, and in many situations are ‘out of control’ or nearly so.”

Today, the original reasons the BLM and the Forest Service were granted law enforcement authority still prevail. In fact, more widespread theft and vandalism of valuable natural and cultural resources continue along with violations in land use and threats to public safety while visiting or working on our public lands.

The BLM and the Forest Service law enforcement programs focus on enforcement of the National Public Land and National Forest laws and regulations. These programs are designed to provide the necessary enforcement to implement the Federal purposes and policies on public lands - not to duplicate or conflict with the law enforcement services of the State and local law enforcement

agencies. These Federal officers are highly trained and specialize in enforcing resource laws and regulations.

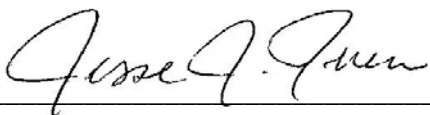
It is often necessary to mobilize and bring together Federal agents to adequately and timely respond to major or significant enforcement challenges. This capability would be lost should existing Federal law enforcement not exist. Public land units, managed by the BLM and Forest Service, quite often cross over several counties and even State boundaries. If enacted this legislation would cause significant logistical, coordination, jurisdictional, and economic challenges for State and local law enforcement agencies.

The BLM and the Forest Service have existing authorities to cooperate with State and local law enforcement agencies that are in place and working well in many locations throughout the United States. When those agencies provide specified services on the national forests and public lands, they are reimbursed for the expenses incurred via law enforcement agreements.

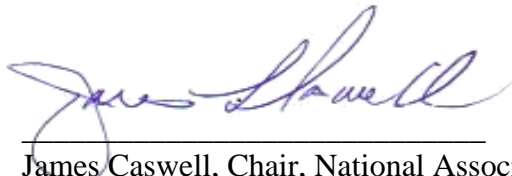
Many county law enforcement agencies are already overwhelmed with their existing workloads and enforcement requirements. To add millions more acres to their areas of responsibility would not increase the safety of the public or the protection of natural and cultural resource values. It would, however, add tremendous costs and inefficiencies to the local law enforcement agencies that are often already challenged for resources. In addition, in many areas the Forest Service and the BLM law enforcement officers coordinate to back each other up in rural areas where the next available officer may be hours away. This adds to the safety of the public and local and Federal officers.

Even though we would agree that there is certainly a need for the Congress to find a solution to the fire funding issue and consider ways to reduce burdensome processes, we do not feel the legislation proposed in H.R. 622 does anything to improve management of our Nation's natural resources or provide better service to the American public. This legislation, in fact, would erode efforts to protect natural and archaeological resources and citizens using public lands, since those efforts would always be in competition with other priorities of local law enforcement agencies.

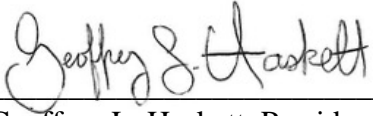
Congress provided the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service law enforcement authority with good reason. The public who enjoy and work on these lands expect and deserve responsible, professional, effective, and efficient service.



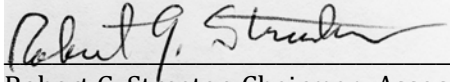
Jesse J. Juen, President, Public Lands Foundation



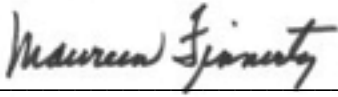
James Caswell, Chair, National Association of Forest Service Retirees



Geoffrey L. Haskett, President, National Wildlife Refuge Association



Robert G. Streeter, Chairman, Association of Retired Fish and Wildlife Employees



Maureen Finnerty, Chairwoman, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks

CC: Ryan Zinke, Secretary of Interior, Department of the Interior, 1849 C. Street NW,
Washington, DC 20240