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Dear Subcommittee Chair Cortez Masto and Ranking Member Lee:

Thank you for meeting tomorrow to consider critical public lands legislation.

Americans love nature for all sorts of reasons -- beauty, wonder, the abundance of food and other resources that only nature can provide. But when it comes to protecting the natural world, we're falling short. Our country today faces a deficit of healthy forests, wetlands and grasslands; of unspoiled rivers, lakes and oceans; and of wildlife of all kinds. Every minute, two football fields worth of the country's natural lands are lost. We're losing forests, grasslands, and places to get out into the great outdoors to see wildlife, hike, climb, camp, fish and hunt.

Environment America supports six of the bills that your committee is reviewing on June 7. These bills will protect public lands that contain critical ecosystems that we so desperately need to maintain biodiversity and also provide recreational opportunities for current and future generations.

The Grand Canyon Protection Act (S.378). The Grand Canyon hosts more than just a beautiful photo opportunity. It is also home to more than 400 species of birds and nearly 100 species of mammals, including bats, bighorn sheep and javelina. Radioactive waste is no better for them than it is for us. We need to make sure this wild area remains unspoiled. No type or amount of mineral is worth trashing this national treasure, and uranium mining is among the riskiest industrial activities in the world.

The Montana Headwaters Legacy Act (S.2254) will designate more than 350 miles of Montana's Gallatin, Madison and Smith rivers, part of the Yellowstone ecosystem, as Wild & Scenic, protecting recreational opportunities for generations of Americans to enjoy.

The M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act (S.3129) would designate 446 miles of river segments in the Gila National Forest as Wild & Scenic including the last free-flowing river in New Mexico, the Gila River. In protecting the river, the Senate can also act to protect the habitat of species including the Gila Trout, Chiricahua leopard frog, yellow-billed cuckoo, and southwestern willow-flycatcher.

The Sutton Mountain and Painted Hills Area Wildfire Resiliency Preservation and Economic Enhancement Act (S.3144). The 66,000-acre proposed monument would include Sutton Mountain along with several popular recreation sites like Pats Cabin, Sand Mountain and Priest Hole and thousands of acres are already protected as Wilderness Study Areas, meaning that the BLM has identified them as worth protecting. A monument designation would block future mining claims within the monument boundary.

The LBL Recreation and Heritage Act (S.3997) addresses deferred maintenance for the Land Between the Lakes Reaction Areas by requiring user fees to be used for that purpose. Additionally, it authorizes \$8 million for annual administration of the recreation area, providing more recreation opportunities for Americans who visit the area.

The Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Expansion Act (S.4080) will expand the monument by 4,000 acres. The proposed expansion site provides many types of habitat, hosting a wide array of wildlife, including 30 species of rare plants, ancient blue oak woodlands, rugged rock outcrops, wildflower meadows, and extensive stands of McNab cypress.

Environment America opposes the following bills that are also being reviewed on June 7. Both of these bills remove protections from public lands:

The Wyoming Public Lands Initiative Act of 2021 (S.1750) would remove protections from nearly 100,000 acres of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming to development.

The HOUSES Act of 2022 (S.4062) would allow local governments to nominate unlimited tracts of unprotected federal public land to be transferred to state and local governments by the Interior Department. These local governments would then be able to sell those lands to developers.

Thank you for your time and attention on these bills. Please reach out to Ellen Montgomery, Public Lands Campaign Director (lmontgomery@environmentamerica.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa Frank
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Affairs

Katie Murtha
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