

Testimony submitted on behalf of:

**Backcountry Hunters and Anglers**  
**Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance**  
**National Wildlife Federation**  
**Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership**  
**Trout Unlimited**

S.1554: The Hunt Unrestricted on National Treasures (HUNT) Act

July 30, 2014

United States Senate  
Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee

Each year, America's 40 million hunters and anglers contribute \$200 billion to the national economy, and support millions of American jobs. Hunting and fishing aren't mere pastimes, they are lifestyles; lifestyles that depend fundamentally on access to quality fish and wildlife habitat. For many hunters, including 72% of all hunters in the Mountain West and Pacific states, access means public lands. Without reliable access to quality habitat, sportsmen reduce their days afield and reduce their economic impact. For small towns across the country, fewer sportsmen mean fewer customers, fewer jobs, and a lower quality of life. Of course, it is no mystery why sportsmen and women stay home: the single most prevalent reason hunters and anglers stop hunting and fishing is lack of access.

Generally speaking, much of the federal estate is open to hunting and fishing; indeed hunting and fishing, and outdoor recreation more broadly, comprise a very core function of these public landscapes. However, a 2004 report to the United States House of Representatives Appropriations Committee concluded that 35 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) land has inadequate access. In some cases, this may mean insufficient parking, poorly maintained trails, or deficient signage. Sportsmen of course need no formal reports to know that quality access is an ongoing challenge, with hunters and anglers increasingly running into locked gates and posted signs.

S.1554, The Hunt Unrestricted on National Treasures (HUNT) Act, before the subcommittee today, would help to solve a particularly problematic, yet highly avoidable, form of restricted access: that of public lands surrounded in close proximity, or "landlocked," by privately-owned lands. A 2013 report found that more than four million acres of public lands in the West remain inaccessible to outdoor recreation because of challenges related to proximate private land ownership.

The HUNT Act begins the process of addressing de facto access closures by identifying public tracts larger than 640 acres that, due to prevailing land ownership patterns, are off limits to public access. For each of those major parcels, the legislation would seek to establish the most appropriate method for providing public access, working with willing landowners to purchase voluntary access easements. When signed by the president, the HUNT Act will represent the only federal program specifically targeting landlocked public lands for enhanced access.

In some cases, a simple spur trail across private lands acquired under HUNT Act provisions could quite literally open thousands of acres to appropriate public use. In this way, the HUNT Act represents a cost-effective way to make sure Americans are permitted the fullest access possible to their public land legacy.

What's more is the sensible way in which the HUNT Act funds the acquisition of voluntary access easements from willing landowners, by designating 1.5% of Land and Water

Conservation Fund dollars specifically for establishing bona fide access to these large tracts currently inaccessible to outdoor recreation enthusiasts. By using this appropriate funding mechanism, the HUNT Act requires no increase in federal expenditures, while guaranteeing a significant return on investment.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance, National Wildlife Federation, and Trout Unlimited support better recreational access across the federal land management paradigm and we view Senator Heinrich's HUNT Act as an important step forward in the issue of making public lands public. We encourage the Energy and Natural Resources Committee to move ahead expeditiously with favorable consideration of Senate bill 1554. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today, please be in touch with additional questions or concerns.