



Kate Miller
Director of Government Affairs

October 19, 2021

The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto, Chair
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Lee, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510

RE: Subcommittee Legislative Hearing (10/19/2021).

Dear Chair Cortez Masto, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the Subcommittee:

I am writing on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU), and our more than 340,000 members and supporters across the country who share in a mission to bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Central to this mission is ensuring the health of our shared public lands and we offer our views on several of the legislative proposals listed for consideration during the Subcommittee's October 19, 2021 legislative hearing.

- [S. 607](#), End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 2021
- [S. 1459](#), the PUBLIC Lands Act
- [S. 1538](#), the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act
- [S. 1589](#), the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act
- [S. 1493](#), the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Kate Miller

A mission to conserve, protect, & restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

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October 19, 2021

Re: S. 607, End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 2021

Trout Unlimited (TU) strongly supports passage of S.607, the End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 2021.

In the 1920's our country promoted oil and gas development by giving companies long-term leases that essentially gave them "dibs" to extract natural resources from public land. At the time it helped boost local economies and spur development. 100 years later, much has changed: fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation are more important now than ever and economic drivers in our communities. But federal policies for oil and gas leasing and development on public lands have not kept pace and wide-spread speculation ties up public land with a right to explore, creates unnecessary conflict, and burdens state and federal agencies with reviewing frivolous lease proposals.

S. 607 will modernize BLM's obligations under the Mineral Leasing Act by directing the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the development potential of lands prior to leasing, and authorizing leasing on lands with high and moderate development potential. The bill will also prohibit leasing on any lands found to have low or no development potential and require BLM to update development potential to inform oil and gas leasing decisions. Under the current system, once leased, low potential lands are not prioritized for other uses like conservation and recreation, regardless of development status. Importantly, the bill authorizes BLM to focus oil and gas development in regions where development and production might actually occur, a practice that would directly benefit coldwater resources.

In the West, 68% of native trout habitat is found on BLM lands with little to no oil and gas development or production potential. Of watersheds that can and do still support native trout in Montana, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Wyoming, Nevada, and Idaho, 73% of these watersheds are within or are composed of public lands. Of the 73%, over half is in areas of low/very low oil and gas development potential. Since 2017, millions of acres of lease parcels were offered up at breakneck pace, often at times for \$1.50 per acre because of their low development and production potential. S.607 would help curb speculative oil and gas leasing and support responsible energy development by promoting a more balanced approach to multiple use management on our public lands.

We thank Senator Cortez Masto for her leadership on this legislation and urge the Committee to advance the bill.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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October 19, 2021

Re: S. 1459, the PUBLIC Lands Act

Trout Unlimited strongly supports S. 1459, the Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act. Our 10,000+ members in California depend on public lands for their fishing and hunting opportunities. Coldwater and terrestrial habitats on many of California's public lands, however, are suffering from a variety of ailments, including impacts associated with climate change (e.g., more frequent and severe wildfire and drought) as well the deterioration of vital infrastructure (roads, trails, boat ramps and campgrounds), illegal trespass cannabis cultivation, and inconsistent monitoring of resource conditions, fish and wildlife populations, and increasing recreational use.

The individual bills that comprise the PUBLIC Lands Act would help address all of these challenges, and were built on feedback from local communities, business interests, and other stakeholders over many years. This legislation will better protect and restore some of California's most iconic salmon, steelhead and trout waters, boost protection of biodiversity and landscape resilience to the hotter and drier conditions associated with climate change and improve more equitable access for all to the outdoors.

The Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation and Working Forests Act will help protect and restore famous steelhead and salmon fisheries and blacktail deer habitat, rehabilitate areas degraded by illegal cannabis grows, improve public access to some of California's most unique lands and waters, restore forest health and reduce risks to local communities from catastrophic wildfire. It will also help local communities capitalize on the region's reputation as one of the best areas for fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation in the West. [This video](#) from Trout Unlimited provides context on the importance of public lands in northern California for fishing and the fishing economy.

The San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act will better protect segments of the San Gabriel River through federal Wild and Scenic River designations. The San Gabriel River is one of the few streams in southern California that offer trout fishing, and scientists have documented remnant genes of the rare southern steelhead in native trout populations here. The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act will confer federal Wild and Scenic River designation on 159 miles of central California coastal streams and help conserve coldwater habitats and fishing opportunities in a semi-arid region where there are few coldwater fishing opportunities. Sespe and Piru Creeks in the Los Padres National Forest would benefit from Wild and Scenic River designation—these creeks are two of only three state-designated Wild Trout streams in southern California and Sespe Creek supports a population of endangered southern steelhead.

For sportsmen and women, there is no substitute for good habitat. We must better protect and restore the best of what remains, and sustain America's unique sporting heritage. The PUBLIC Lands Act would

do exactly that for some of the most productive fishing and hunting grounds in California. We thank Senators Padilla and Feinstein for their leadership on this legislation and urge the Committee to advance the bill.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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October 19, 2021

Re: S. 1538, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act

Trout Unlimited strongly supports S.1538, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act. Our 14,000+ members and supporters in California and Oregon depend on the Smith River for some of the best salmon and steelhead fishing in either state and have strongly supported previous efforts to better protect the entire Smith River watershed.

Up and down the West Coast, wild salmon and steelhead runs are in decline; some populations are close to extirpation. To recover and sustain these species, and the multi-billion dollar commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries they support, we must strengthen protections for our best remaining coldwater habitats — those “strongholds” that continue to provide clean, cold water for fish and people and the ecological integrity to help buffer salmon and trout against the impacts of climate change. Typically, salmon and steelhead strongholds are rivers with existing legislative or administrative protections and stable fish populations which provide critical resiliency to regional almon and steelhead stocks.

The Wild and Scenic Smith River is one of the premier salmon strongholds on the Pacific Coast. But proposed industrial-scale mining in its headwaters could devastate water quality and the wild salmon and steelhead of this river. The Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act is timely, necessary, and broadly supported legislation that will permanently protect the Smith River by withdrawing the last 58,000 acres in the watershed now vulnerable to strip mining from new mining claims.

In addition, we note that this and other public lands conservation bills being heard today by this committee are the kinds of locally-driven initiatives that would help achieve the goals of the Biden Administration’s America the Beautiful campaign and California’s 30 x 30 initiative. We thank Senators Merkley, Wyden, Padilla and Feinstein for their leadership on this legislation and urge the Committee to advance the bill.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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Kate Miller
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October 19, 2021

Re: S. 1589, the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act

Trout Unlimited strongly supports S.1589, the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act.

As hunters and anglers, we know firsthand of the remarkable values found in watersheds like the Rogue and Molalla, along with the diverse hunting and angling opportunities provided by the Kalmiopsis Region in Southwest Oregon. The Rogue is home to exceptional runs of fall Chinook, summer and winter steelhead, as well as thriving populations of black bears, Roosevelt elk, and blacktail deer. Similarly, the Kalmiopsis Region provides some of the most intact habitat for anadromous species in the lower 48 states. The Molalla River accounts for production of over 25% of each year's run of endangered Willamette Basin winter steelhead and provides drinking water for more than 25,000 Oregonians who make their homes in the cities of Canby and Molalla. These rivers collectively represent some of our best hopes for recovery of salmon and steelhead populations and attract guides and sports anglers from around the West, supporting our region's travel and tourism economy.

We thank Senators Wyden and Merkley for their leadership on this legislation and the Committee for considering the bill in this week's hearing. Trout Unlimited supports S.1589 and we urge you to favorably advance the bill.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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October 15, 2021

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The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto
Chair, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,
366 Dirksen Senate Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Lee
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
366 Dirksen Senate Building
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Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (S. 1493)

Dear Chairman Cortez Masto and Ranking Member Lee,

Montana Trout Unlimited (MTU) works to conserve, protect and restore coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. With more than 4,200 members represented by thirteen local chapters around the state of Montana, our organization supports conservation projects that benefit fish, wildlife, and people. That's why MTU is proud to support the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project (BCSA), S. 1493, that is pending before your subcommittee.

Each year thousands of anglers come to Montana from across the country to fish some of the greatest trout streams in the world. Among those is the Blackfoot River, an iconic river that is a model of what long-term restoration through collaborative processes looks like. The Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited was created in 1987 with the purpose of restoring this iconic coldwater fishery by working with diverse partners and private landowners to preserve the working landscapes and critical habitats that sustain the health of the watershed. The Chapter, along with MTU, numerous watershed groups and hundreds of landowners have worked to invest over \$15 million on more than 750 restoration projects reconnecting tributaries, installing fish screens, and improving over 500 stream miles, all while improving agricultural and ranching

use and boosting the local economy through job creation. Thanks to that collaboration the Blackfoot and its tributaries are once again thriving with wild, native trout. The BCSA will provide meaningful protections for the critical habitats that partners have invested in restoring as well as ensuring access and sustaining the Valley's rural heritage and agricultural economy.

The BCSA adds to this legacy by protecting almost 80,000 acres of backcountry public lands containing pristine headwater streams. Places like the West Fork of the Clearwater River, Monture Creek, and North Fork of the Blackfoot River boast some of the highest quality fish habitat for native species like the westslope cutthroat trout and the Endangered Species Act threatened bull trout. The BCSA will protect hundreds of miles of those critical spawning tributaries. Further, protecting headwater streams through the BSCA is one way to help recover and delist species, like bull trout.

Montanans know that when we work together, we can craft collaborative solutions that solve complex public land management challenges, from wildfire to wildlife and from motorized trail use to native trout. The BCSA promises to result in positive impacts to the local economy through active forest management and trail maintenance and the creation of over 180 jobs annually. This legislation finds the balance between user groups on federal lands by creating recreation areas for winter motorized use and mountain biking while still allowing for the protection of backcountry hunting and fishing opportunities. The Blackfoot River Valley is a model in our country for what long-term collaborative conservation and restoration can achieve, and the BCSA builds on those decades of progress.

We urge you to support the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act as it will serve as a legislative model for the rest of our state and the country of how local collaboration can provide certainty for all stakeholders and succeed in truly benefitting both the environment and people. Thank you considering our organization's position and being part of this success story by helping to pass the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act.

Respectfully,



David Brooks
Executive Director
Montana Trout Unlimited



Clayton Elliott
Conservation Director
Montana Trout Unlimited

cc:

The Honorable Jon Tester, United States Senator
The Honorable Steve Daines, United States Senator
The Honorable Matt Rosendale, United States House of Representatives