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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 6, 2000

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
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Charles E. Harris
President
The Wildlife Society, Idaho Chapter
321 Ada St
Boise, ID 83702-2904

Dear Charles:

Thank you for contacting me to express your support for the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA). I appreciate knowing of your interest and welcome the opportunity to respond.

A number of legislative proposals seek to use revenues from Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leases for natural resource protection initiatives. Currently, OCS funds go to the general treasury where they are used for general functions of the federal government. These bills would all remove a significant portion of OCS funds from the general treasury, take them off-budget, and use them for resource conservation proposals.

CARA is the title of several bills that have been introduced in the 106th Congress (H.R. 701, S. 25, S. 2123, and S. 2567). Much of the legislative focus thus far in the 106th Congress has been on H.R. 701. H.R. 701, introduced by Representative Don Young (R-Alaska), was passed by the House of Representatives on May 11, 2000, by a vote of 315-102. The final bill was the result of negotiations between Representative Young, Chairman of the House Resources Committee, and Representative George Miller (D-California), the Ranking Member of the Committee.

Each of the Senate bills has been similar to different versions of H.R. 701. S. 25, introduced by Senator Mary Landrieu (D-Louisiana), is identical to H.R. 701 as introduced. S. 2123, also introduced by Senator Landrieu, is identical to H.R. 701 as amended and reported out of the House Resources Committee. S. 2567, introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-California), is identical to H.R. 701 as passed by the full House. It is my understanding that S. 2123 is likely to be the vehicle the Senate will consider.

Although I support many of the provisions in these bills, I have serious concerns regarding the amount and priority of federal funding for additional federal land acquisitions. The federal government currently estimates a backlog of maintenance needs on federal lands of between \$12-\$20 billion. The threat to our public lands because of this backlog is very real. More than thirty-nine million acres of Forest Service land is currently at risk of catastrophic fire, and many more millions are at risk from insect and disease. Clearly, the maintenance backlog and shortfalls in operations funding should be addressed before more land is added to an already overburdened system.

Additionally, I am concerned that the impacts on counties when land is acquired by the federal government are not addressed in these bills. When the federal government acquires land,

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those lands are taken off the county tax rolls. To mitigate the impact of this loss, and the many services counties must provide on or near public lands, Congress instituted the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program. Through PILT payments, counties are compensated for the impact of federal lands. However, PILT payments have not been fully funded. Full funding for PILT should be a priority for any CARA legislation.

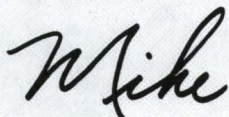
I also share the concerns of many Idahoans over the impact of the CARA bills on private property rights. I recognize the need to protect lands and our environment, and I have supported locally-led conservation proposals in the past, including Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisitions. However, we must assure that private property is protected through protections against condemnation and the like. These protections are not currently in the bill. And we should resist the temptation to bring significant new amounts of private property into federal ownership.

Many of the goals of these bills are laudable. There are reasonable objectives in the legislation, but like many reasonable policies, they must be considered in the context of all our priorities and obligations. It is my hope that as this legislation continues through the process, my concerns regarding private property impacts, PILT payments, the conditions of existing public lands and resources, and the budgetary impacts of this bill will be resolved. As currently proposed, I oppose the CARA bills.

You may be interested to know that the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, of which I am a member, held hearings on the CARA bills on May 23, 2000. Although these bills are pending before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, many of their provisions are relevant to the Environment and Public Works Committee. As such, I look forward to working with my colleagues on both committees to resolve the reservations that I, and many Idahoans, have about this legislation.

Again, thank you for contacting me. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future on this or other matters of importance to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mike Crapo
United States Senator

MDC/mq