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**CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL PARKS PANEL CRITICIZES FOREST SERVICE
FOR MISUSING \$17 MILLION IN WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT FUNDS**

Washington -- Chairman Bruce Vento (D-MN) of the National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee today criticized the Forest Service for mispending funds Congress appropriated for wilderness management.

Congress has responded to Forest Service requests for more wilderness management funding by increasing that area of the Forest Service budget by 80% over the past 4 years. Vento said a General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation he ordered discovered that 60% of that funding never reached the wilderness management programs, the purpose for which it was appropriated by Congress. For example, in fiscal year 1990, Congress increased wilderness management funding by 20%, yet the Forest Service actually decreased funding for wilderness management activities by 4% that year.

Where has that money gone and why wasn't it used for wilderness protection? Vento said he is determined to find out when the Forest Service and GAO testify before his subcommittee tomorrow at 10 a.m. in Room 1324 Longworth.

"Year after year, the Forest Service has told this subcommittee it needs more funding for wilderness management," Vento said. "Now we find out that more than half of the money we intended for wilderness management has gone to other activities. This is mismanagement of the worst kind and our wilderness areas will suffer immensely because of it."

Chairman Vento will hold a press briefing prior to the hearing in 1324 Longworth at 9:15 a.m.