

Senate Joint Resolution No. 3—Committee on
Natural Resources

FILE NUMBER.....

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION—Urging Congress to take certain actions concerning wilderness areas and wilderness study areas.

WHEREAS, The provisions of 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131 et seq., commonly referred to as the Wilderness Act, establish the National Wilderness Preservation System, which consists of areas of federal public land that are designated by Congress as wilderness areas; and

WHEREAS, Congress has designated approximately 2 million acres of certain federal public lands in Nevada as wilderness areas; and

WHEREAS, If an area of federal public land is designated as a wilderness area, it must be managed in a manner that preserves the wilderness character of the area and ensures that the area remains unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as a wilderness area; and

WHEREAS, A reasonable amount of wilderness area in this state provides for a diverse spectrum of recreational opportunities in Nevada, promotes tourism and provides a place for Nevadans to escape the pressures of urban growth; and

WHEREAS, In conjunction with the provisions of the Wilderness Act, the Bureau of Land Management of the Department of the Interior in the late 1970s conducted an initial inventory of approximately 49 million acres of federal public lands in Nevada to determine the suitability of such lands for designation as wilderness areas or identification as wilderness study areas and, in 1980, recommended that approximately 5.1 million acres of those lands be identified as wilderness study areas; and

WHEREAS, Until a wilderness study area is designated by Congress as a wilderness area or released for multiple use, the wilderness study area must be managed in a manner that does not impair its suitability for preservation as a wilderness area; and

WHEREAS, In 1991, the Bureau of Land Management recommended that Congress designate as wilderness areas approximately 1.9 million acres of the 5.1 million acres of wilderness study areas in Nevada and release the remainder of the wilderness study areas for multiple use; and

WHEREAS, Although Congress recently enacted the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002, Public Law 107-282 (2002), which released approximately 224,000 acres in Clark County from its current status as wilderness study areas, the recommendations made by the Bureau of Land Management in 1991 have largely not been acted upon by Congress, and the Bureau continues to manage approximately 3.86 million

acres of federal public lands in Nevada identified as wilderness study areas; and

WHEREAS, It is important that decisions concerning whether to designate wilderness study areas as wilderness areas or release those areas for multiple use are made in a timely manner without any unnecessary delays as the identification of federal public lands as wilderness study areas is believed to impose significant restrictions on the management and use of those lands; and

WHEREAS, It is also important to protect the ecological health and existing and potential economic and recreational benefits of wilderness areas and wilderness study areas in this state by using reasonable and effective methods of fire suppression in those areas; and

WHEREAS, Because approximately 2 million acres of federal public land in Nevada have been designated as wilderness areas and approximately 8.6 percent of the federal public land in Nevada that is managed by the Bureau of Land Management has been identified as wilderness study areas and because such designation or identification is believed to impose significant restrictions concerning the management and use of such land, including land used for mining, ranching and recreation, the Legislative Commission appointed a subcommittee in 2001 to conduct an interim study of wilderness areas and wilderness study areas in this state; and

WHEREAS, During the 2001-2002 legislative interim, the subcommittee met several times throughout this state and facilitated important and wide-ranging discussions among many agencies, organizations and persons with diverse interests, perspectives and expertise concerning wilderness areas and wilderness study areas; and

WHEREAS, The subcommittee received a great deal of valuable input from those agencies, organizations and persons, including many valuable recommendations for Congress to consider in addressing the issues concerning wilderness areas and wilderness study areas in a responsible, reasonable and fair manner; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, JOINTLY, That the members of the Nevada Legislature urge Congress to:

1. Support efforts to ensure that adequate access to wilderness areas and wilderness study areas is afforded to the appropriate agencies and persons so that those agencies and persons may effectively combat fires in wilderness areas and wilderness study areas;
2. Support the use of all reasonable and effective fire suppression efforts in wilderness areas and wilderness study areas

without strictly confining such efforts only to the tools determined by the federal agencies which manage federal public lands to be the minimum tools necessary;

3. Accept the recommendation of the Bureau of Land Management to designate 1.9 million acres of certain wilderness study areas in Nevada as wilderness areas while also incorporating in the designation process flexibility to consider relevant information such as growth to ensure the establishment of appropriate boundaries for those areas and recognizing that such consideration may result in a reasonable adjustment of those boundaries;

4. Oppose any efforts to conduct another inventory of the federal public lands in Nevada for purposes of creating wilderness areas or wilderness study areas without first releasing wilderness study areas determined to be unsuitable for designation as wilderness areas;

5. Ensure that more current information is considered before acting on the recommendations of the Bureau of Land Management concerning the designation of wilderness areas in Nevada as the surveys of the Bureau were performed with limited time, resources and technology; and

6. Avoid any unnecessary delays in releasing wilderness study areas for multiple use by establishing a plan for addressing the release of wilderness study areas in a timely manner that includes a schedule or plan for the timely consideration of important issues concerning wilderness study areas; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of the Senate prepare and transmit a copy of this resolution to the Vice President of the United States as the presiding officer of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and each member of the Nevada Congressional Delegation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution becomes effective upon passage.