

Proposed bill would open more lands for off-roading, mining

Karen Jonas, Barstow Desert Dispatch, 6-12-11

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A bill proposed by a California congressman would allow nearly three million acres of land — currently designated as being unsuitable for wilderness — within the state to be opened for multiple uses, such as off-roading and mining.

The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011 — H.R. 1581 — was proposed by Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-22) in April and seeks to put control of lands designated as being unsuitable for wilderness — which are lands that were studied for wilderness designation but never classified as wilderness areas by Congress — back in the hands of local agencies, such as the local offices of the Bureau of Land Management, according to a statement recently released by McCarthy.

The bill's language states that the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 left BLM lands that could not be classified as wilderness, yet are not being used. McCarthy stated that 6.7 million acres of BLM land throughout the U.S. are classified as unsuitable for wilderness.

About 36 million acres of national forest lands were also never designated as wilderness, yet have restrictions on public access and use, according to McCarthy.

The bill is sponsored mainly by Republicans, including Rep. Buck McKeon, who represents Barstow as part of the 25th District. There are currently 22 cosponsors for the bill.

McCarthy stated that more than three million acres in California are unavailable for public use.

“This means many rural and outlying communities that depend on tourism and recreation cannot maximize the potential of the public lands in their area,” said McCarthy.

For local off-roader Mike McCain, the bill is a step in the right direction of opening public lands for everyone's use.

“The land has to be multi-use; it won't be excluding anybody,” said McCain. “If it's open for one group, it should be open for all groups. That's the only fair way.”

For more information on the bill and to show support or opposition for the bill, visit <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h112-1581>