



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

September 20, 2000

H.R. 1500 **America's Wilderness Protection Act**

As ordered reported by the House Committee on Resources on September 13, 2000

H.R. 1500 would establish a 10-year deadline for completing wilderness studies on federal lands. CBO estimates that enacting this bill would have no significant impact on the federal budget over the next 10 years. H.R. 1500 could affect direct spending (including offsetting receipts), but pay-as-you-go procedures would not apply because any such changes would not occur before 2011. H.R. 1500 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The Wilderness Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act authorize wilderness study areas (WSAs) on federal lands and direct the Secretary of the Interior to study those areas for potential designation as wilderness. Once a WSA is established by the Secretary, legislation is required to change the classification of the study area to either a wilderness or non-wilderness area. Under H.R. 1500, 10 years after enactment, all current WSAs would be released from that status to non-wilderness uses. The bill also would require that any new WSAs established after H.R. 1500 could be studied for a maximum of 10 years before being released from that status.

Of the 264 million acres of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the agency responsible for managing WSAs, 18 million acres are currently included in more than 600 such areas. Based on information from BLM, CBO expects that many of those areas will remain WSAs 10 years from now. Releasing those lands from WSA status would open them to new income-generating activities, particularly new mineral leasing and development, that otherwise would be prohibited under current law. Hence, we expect that H.R. 1500 could result in an increase in offsetting receipts from those activities, but we cannot estimate the amount of any such increase because we do not know which WSAs would be released under H.R. 1500 or the resource potential of those lands.

According to BLM, public lands with the highest leasing potential generally lie outside of WSAs. Thus, we expect that any increase in offsetting receipts from mineral leasing and

development under H.R. 1500 would be small relative to the amounts generated from such activities across all BLM lands, which we estimate will total about \$1.5 billion in 2000. Under the bill, no additional offsetting receipts could occur before fiscal year 2011.

The CBO staff contact is Megan Carroll. This estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.