

Testimony of Grant Simonds
United States Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
September 27, 2006

Thank you Senator Craig and Sub-Committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony on S. 3793 and H.R. 3603.

My name is Grant Simonds and I am the Executive Director of the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, a statewide non-profit business trade organization. I am most familiar with S. 3793, the Owyhee Initiative Implementation Act, having served as an Owyhee Initiative work group member since its inception in August of 2001. I have been exploring, camping, hiking, boating and hunting in Owyhee County for 35 years and have enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the county landscape as a result of this collaborative process. I believe the Owyhee County commissioners chose folks for this collaborative process in part because of their "can-do" attitude toward resolving future management of most federal lands in Owyhee County. The commissioners recognized a window of opportunity and carefully crafted a goal statement for the working group. IOGA supports the goal that is found in this legislation.

In my capacity as a Work Group member, I have represented the outfitting and guiding industry as well as non-guided hunters. My focus as a work group member has been on appropriate access and related detailed mapping. The process has been a very open one with numerous opportunities for any and all to provide input.

The Owyhee Initiative agreement and this legislation reflect the necessities of outfitting and guiding namely clean, free flowing streams, quality fish and wildlife habitat and populations, along with the tenets of reasonable regulation. For the outfitting industry, rivers such as the Jarbidge/Bruneau, South and East Fork Owyhee along with associated high desert lands add to the diversity of outfitted opportunity that Idaho is known for. The 386 miles of potentially designated rivers and streams in Owyhee County will be a selling point for my industry, complementing the existing wild and scenic rivers in the state and the larger network of 32,000 Idaho river miles, the most in the lower 48. There is nothing more exciting than sighting bighorn sheep, whether it is on a river trip or being one of the lucky ones who draws a tag to hunt. The Initiative will be good for wild sheep.

Language in this legislation to specifically address outfitting and guiding in wilderness areas is necessary to assure the continuation of the present working system that allows public use and enjoyment of the wilderness. The language is a clear signal to those who would dismantle the system and remove outfitter operations from wilderness. It is not intended in any way to impede the responsible management of outfitter operations to assure their minimum impact upon the wilderness resource or to impede agency authority to set numbers of allocated launches and reserved camps or how they are run. This system, in balance with other camps and launches used by the self-guided public, allows responsible, shared use of wilderness lands for recreation and other purposes. These are tools recognized by the land managing agencies as necessary to allow planned dispersion and control of use in wilderness areas. The system allows the public who use outfitter services to plan and schedule their visit. These camps and launches are designated in operating plans, established between the individual outfitter and the resource manager. The manner, location and time of their operations are agreed to in the operating plan of each individual

outfitter. This legislation does not amend the Wilderness Act or lock in outfitters' use.

We feel there is necessity for specific outfitter language in the bill. The tendency in the past was to generalize in the legislation, then add detail in committee reports and the legislative record. Our experience has been that people seem to forget the background of the general language. The outfitter lodges on the Main Salmon River are a good example. It took over 20 years of administrative, legal and legislative work to clarify that the three camps on the river were what Congress was talking about when they referenced "existing uses" in the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980.

Outfitter operations have undergone considerable change to adapt to modifications brought on by wilderness designation. The trade association representing outfitters in Idaho has made a strong commitment to be role models and educators in minimum impact practices.

After five-plus years of negotiations at the table and during field trips, which included hunters, motorized recreation interests, ranchers and conservationists, about 30 miles of road mapped by hunters are proposed to be closed. More than 500 miles requested by hunters will remain open to all, by law. Access is recognized in this legislation through a number of cherry stem, wilderness corridor and wilderness boundary four-wheel drive roads that have and will continue to be utilized by all public land users. Ninety percent of the 517,000 acre wilderness areas will be within one to two miles of a road, an appropriate amount of access for wilderness areas, some of which are ninety minutes from one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the West. An additional eight rights-of-way across private lands plus twelve new public access points across lands that will be purchased or traded to become public lands were also negotiated by the Owyhee Initiative work group. Keep in mind that over 10,000 miles of road or routes criss-crossing Owyhee County. This legislation will assist both the county and the agency to get a grip on the growing problem of indiscriminate use of off highway vehicles.

In conclusion, the Owyhee Initiative provides a framework for preserving the best of Owyhee County including the existing economy and cultural resources through a locally devised collaborative plan that includes wilderness and wild and scenic river designations, wilderness study area release, a continuing board of directors, the establishment of a conservation center and science review process along with an on and off road transportation plan. This is a much better way to manage our federal lands than through the court rooms: