

FOR RELEASE  
The week of March 18, 2019  
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## **LANDS BILL FURTHERS SUCCESS OF OWYHEE COLLABORATIVE**

*Guest column submitted by U.S. Senator Mike Crapo*

The Senate and House of Representatives both passed S.47, Natural Resources Management Act, by overwhelmingly, bipartisan votes, and President Trump signed it into law. This new law contains boundary changes for three wilderness areas in Owyhee County. These changes are important to the ongoing implementation of the hard-sought Owyhee Initiative (OI), which provides for the sustainability of this special part of our great state. It also helps ensure the long-term success of this outstanding example of collaborative resource management.

I advocate for collaboration to achieve locally-driven solutions to natural resources and environmental challenges, because—although neither easy nor quick—it works. Through bringing all interests to the table and facing the contentious issues head on, productive relationships develop, common ground can be found and solutions are discovered.

But, like building a house, after complete, the house cannot be left without proper maintenance and expected to stand the test of time. Likewise, even after collaborative solutions are codified in law, work continues to ensure implementation, particularly by federal agencies, is carried out as intended to secure the long-term success of these solutions.

The Owyhee Initiative is a primary example. The Initiative started in 2001 when the Owyhee County Commissioners tackled the decades-old land management issues in their county. They pulled together a broad representation of interests and worked tirelessly toward passage of Owyhee Public Lands Management Act. Since the enactment of the initiative into law as part of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act (P.L. 111-11), all of us who have worked on this effort are actively involved in implementing its many provisions.

My introduction of the [Owyhee Wilderness Areas Boundary Modifications Act](#), with fellow Idaho Senator James E. Risch, was another step in continuing to fully implement the Owyhee Initiative. The bill addresses necessary boundary adjustments in wilderness areas associated with the original Owyhee Public Lands Management Act. These changes in three wilderness areas are needed to reflect the original intent of the members of the Owyhee Initiative and were developed to maintain agreed-upon traditional access by ranchers as well as respecting one primitive camping area. Maintaining the access and use of public lands for all stakeholders has always been the goal of the Owyhee Initiative. Inclusion of the adjustments in the Owyhee Wilderness Areas Boundary Modification Act in the Senate-passed Natural Resources Management Act helps ensure those who

have utilized public lands for decades in the Owyhees will continue to do so, while maintaining the new preservation measures in the Owyhees.

“These corrections to the wilderness boundaries, supported by all the members of the Owyhee Initiative, shows that collaboration in Idaho works,” said Craig Gehrke, Idaho Director of the Wilderness Society. “Collaboration produces enduring, workable solutions.”

Brenda Richards, chair of the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors, said, “This completes one of the corrections needed that has always had unanimous support from the OI Board of Directors, illustrating that genuine collaboration can achieve meaningful, enduring results in Idaho.”

The [Natural Resources Management Act](#), referred to as the lands package, contains various public lands, natural resources and water bills. In addition to the Owyhee boundary adjustments, highlights of the legislation include clarification that all Bureau of Land Management and National Forest System lands shall be open to hunting and fishing unless explicitly closed for safety or other justified reasons; provisions to provide greater local control of water management decisions; and permanent reauthorization and reform of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Even with the President having signed this legislation into law, there is still work to do. I will continue to work for full implementation of this important legislation.

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Word Count: 599