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The Wilderness Society urges Congress to immediately pass the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. As a land conservation organization with over one million members and supporters, we believe that public lands can only be effectively protected and stewarded when we acknowledge the true history of these places and when the sovereignty and rights of Tribal Nations are upheld. These lands hold the stories of the people and communities connected to them – stories of strength and resilience, but also of unimaginable pain. By supporting the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, we take a step towards recognizing and reconciling with the damaging history and legacies of Indian Boarding Schools. We also support the protection, preservation, reclamation, and co-management of sites across the Federal Indian boarding school system where the Federal Government has jurisdiction over a location, especially where these lands are public lands.

The Truth and Healing Legislation lays out a pathway through which the government can address and reckon with the violent history of Indian Boarding Schools. Enacting this legislation would mark a vital step towards acknowledgment of and healing from the traumas Native people have endured as a result of the Federal Indian Boarding School system.

Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Native youth were abducted from their families as settlers attempted to sever these children from their families, cultures, lands, and identities. This assimilation tactic, deeply entwined with efforts to dispossess Indigenous people of their lands, was intended to destroy them. The intergenerational trauma from the horrors that occurred at these schools continues to have a profound impact on Indigenous people and communities today. It is long past time that the United States government reckon with this violent history and recognize the harms it has caused and continues to cause.

The Truth and Healing legislation would establish a Federal Commission to formally investigate, document, and report on the histories of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States. Expanding upon the historic progress made by the Department of the Interior under the leadership of Secretary Haaland, the Federal Commission would complete a comprehensive analysis of the Federal government's involvement in promoting Indian Boarding Schools and their assimilationist policies. Based on these findings, the Commission would develop recommendations for actions the Federal government can take to meaningfully acknowledge this history. These actions may include promoting education and awareness about Indian Boarding Schools, and measures to protect the burial sites and make possible the repatriation of the remains of children who were killed at these schools.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Starlyn Miller, Native Lands Partnerships Senior Director for The Wilderness Society at Starlyn_Miller@tws.org.