

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment
hearing on “Brownfields Reauthorization: Discussion Draft”
April 4, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Every Oregon city and county, whether rural or urban, has vacant, underused and potentially contaminated properties that if left unchecked can be a nuisance on the community. If these sites are cleaned up, however, they could have meaningful economic impact on jobs, wages, and additional property tax revenue. The EPA Brownfields program has changed the way we perceive and manage contaminated property. The grants and assistance provided through the program empowers states, communities, and other economic redevelopment stakeholders to work together to assess, remediate, and sustainably reuse these properties.

Recently this committee and our colleagues on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee have begun re-examining this important program. The discussion draft before us is a first step to addressing some of the issues we heard about in previous hearings. The bill we review this morning makes needed improvements to the Brownfields Program to ensure that, working together, we can continue to promote infrastructure and economic development and return contaminated property to productive use.

My home state of Oregon has a very active Brownfields Program and we've seen some great recent success in my district in particular. Last year in The Dalles, Google broke ground on an expansion to their data center on 26 acres of former mill land that was cleaned up under this program. A \$600 million investment expected to create 50 new jobs. In my hometown of Hood River, the Port of Hood River just finished a Brownfields cleanup of another former mill site, opening up over 12 acres of land for future business opportunities in the area.

Oregon is also on the leading edge of brownfields cleanup. In fact, in 2015 the Oregon state legislature took steps to encourage local governments to acquire and redevelop contaminated properties through the creation of Land Bank Authorities. These Land Banks would purchase or acquire brownfield properties and promote development in ways that meet the local community's particular needs.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality supports fully funding the Brownfields Program and enthusiastically supports many of the revisions made by the discussion draft.

We hope that the witnesses here today will let us know if we are on the right track with the discussion draft and if necessary, that they will help us identify other ways to improve the Brownfields Program and the brownfields law.

Our new EPA Administrator has stressed the importance of getting contaminated sites cleaned up and the Brownfields Program is a vital component of this process. Therefore, we remain committed to working with our colleagues across the aisle and on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to ensure that the Brownfields Program will continue to encourage EPA, states, and local governments to work together to redevelop brownfields properties and create new jobs, leverage private investment, and provide for economic development. And I'm hopeful the witnesses here today can provide us their thoughts on the discussion draft before us today and other ways to improve the Brownfields program as we continue our work.